

Hafa Adai!

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Healthcare provider wants lawsuit dismissed. **PAGE 3**

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Contempt findings now with OAG

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

House of Representatives Speaker Edmund S. Villagomez (Ind-Saipan) has forwarded the certified state-



Villagomez

ment of contempt against Nonstop Corp.'s Robert Travilla and Salina Sapp to the Office of the Attorney General for prosecution in the Superior Court.

In a letter addressed to Attorney General Edward Manibusan last week, Villagomez certified the findings of the House Special

Committee on Federal Assistance and Disaster-related Funding that cited business partners Travilla
See HOUSE on Page 4

Torres supports King-Hinds to be GOP's bet for delegate



FERDIE DE LA TORRE

Former governor Ralph DLG Torres hugs former Commonwealth Ports Authority board chair Kimberlyn King-Hinds during the latter's official announcement of her decision to run for office under the NMI Republican Party as the CNMI's delegate for the U.S. House of Representatives, at the Marianas Business Plaza in Susupe last Feb. 29.

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

Former governor Ralph DLG Torres disclosed Friday that he supports former Commonwealth Ports Authority board chair Kimberlyn King-Hinds to be the NMI Republican Party's bet for
See TORRES on Page 4



Palauan association inducts new officers

CHRYSTAL MARINO

Ferdinand Ngirmekur of the Palau Community Association-CNMI prays over the association's newly inducted leadership at the Garapan Central Park last Saturday.

By CHRYSTAL MARINO
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CORRESPONDENT

It was a celebration and representation of culture as dozens of Palauan community members from near and far, along with Republic of Palau

President Surangel Whipps Jr. and his delegation, joined the Palau Community Association-CNMI as the group welcomed their new officers last Saturday at the Garapan Central Park.

Johnvianney Tutiy was sworn in as

See PALAUAN on Page 4



CHRYSTAL MARINO

Palau Community Association-CNMI president Johnvianney Tutiy shares his remarks after his induction last Saturday at the Garapan Central Park.

Missing woman found

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
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REPORTER

The woman who was reported missing has been found safe, according to the Department of Public Safety.

DPS initially reported that Kagman III resident Salaneta Wessel was missing

See MISSING on Page 4

INSIDE



BUSINESS

A newly-created working group composed of members of the Legislature and members of the Saipan Chamber of Commerce aims to tackle economic and other issues the CNMI currently faces.

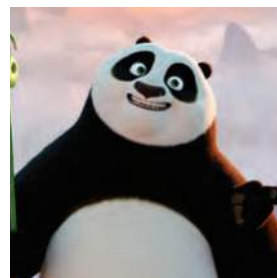
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WORLD

Russian President Vladimir Putin basked in a victory early Monday that was never in doubt, as partial election results showed him easily securing a fifth term.

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LIFE & STYLE

"Kung Fu Panda 4" stayed at the top of the North American box office in its second weekend in theaters.

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Local

Norita: DOF's troubling state of financial system resulted from a rushed, poorly planned process

By **FERDIE DE LA TORRE**
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REPORTER

Finance Secretary Tracy B. Norita said yesterday the "troubling" state of the CNMI government's financial system resulted from a rushed, chaotic storm of a poorly planned and executed implementation process.

What normally would be a 24- to 36-month process was rushed in 14 months, Norita said, resulting in many "temporary fixes," inefficient workflows, and inaccurate data and financial reporting.

Norita talked about the DOF's financial system in her memorandum yesterday to Gov. Arnold I. Palacios in response to Munis system consultant Shalee M. Davis' observations and findings about the implementation of the Munis system. In her report to Palacios, Davis described the DOF staff and Norita as having minimal knowledge of Munis, rendering them incapable of generating reports necessary for the governor's office or the Legislature.

Munis integrates finances, payroll, human resources, purchasing, fixed assets, revenue streams, and other government processes.

Davis, who is consultant/owner of Davis ERP Consulting, has been doing consulting

work for the Munis system with the CNMI government in the past year.

In her response yesterday to Davis' letter to Palacios, Norita said that Davis was actually part of the Tyler Munis implementation team. Although she is leaving after failing to secure a consulting contract with the Office of the Governor, Norita said they still maintain support services of other Munis experts from Tyler Technologies, which is the Munis software company that assists thousands of other government offices.

Norita said the DOF leadership has made it a priority since January 2023 to train staff on the Munis system, identify and understand its strengths and limitations, and adjust accordingly to respond to the CNMI's needs and long-term viability.

Norita said she exercised her authority to make internal changes that required more work, more training, and pooling resources, which made some "uncomfortable." However, she said, it was absolutely necessary to begin the work of restoring the integrity of their financial system and rebuild employee confidence through self-sufficiency. Norita said this shift in DOF's priorities meant that her primary support would be focused on

staff, not consultants.

She said another important focus was to identify prior management decisions in the initial implementation that caused setbacks in the quality and accuracy of financial data, such as "turning off" the budget controls and failing to "turn them on."

The secretary said Davis has invaluable historical knowledge in the implementation decisions of former Finance secretary David DLG. Atalig and management during that period. However, Norita said, the shift in priorities to build local capacity did not align well with Davis and the difference in personalities and cultures did not "fit."

She pointed out that DOF staff deserve the necessary training and tools they need to do their jobs—not have someone do it for them. This cannot be done, she said, if they continue to rely on consultants to help with even the most basic financial functions in every section of the office.

Norita said reliance on a system's consultant to do accounting and financial tasks is costly, inefficient, and a liability to their fiduciary role.

To date, she said, DOF staff have increased their

capacity and have come a long way in revamping system processes and making the necessary changes to improve their work.

However, she said, further training is still needed to take advantage of the powerful features of Munis beyond the current uses.

Norita shared that DOF staff told her in January 2023 that they were only given the bare minimum training to do basic functions, but were not trained enough to do all the necessary functions their job required. This forced many staff to rely on manual solutions until training became available, leaving many tasks incomplete.

In Davis' last two weeks as an employee, Norita said, her sole instruction was to transfer knowledge and train key personnel.

Norita said she also leveraged their strong relationship with fellow finance officers at the Palau Ministry of Finance to learn from their successful implementation of Tyler Munis, specifically in bank reconciliation.

She said the finance officers at the Palau Ministry of Finance generously conducted hands-on training and troubleshooting for the

CNMI—for free.

Norita said they learned that CNMI DOF staff were never trained on a module that could have helped them reconcile bank balances since the beginning—a stark failure of the implementation team and prior management.

She said Davis' statement that Palau "differs significantly from the CNMI" is unfounded. While the size, scope, and areas of interest may differ, there are far more commonalities in CNMI finance offices since they all adhere to international/federal accounting standards, she said.

As for financial reporting, Norita said her staff make every effort to provide the necessary reports to CNMI leaders, which includes review and analysis of the financial information that is being presented.

While previous practices include running a report from the system with erroneous entries in prior years, they simply cannot rely on such a method, she said.

DOF staff have certainly made significant improvements in understanding reporting features, but there is still much to be learned, she added.

Norita said the primary job of the consultant was to train staff in functionality and features that would allow staff to report effectively. However,

er, she said, without accurate information in the system, these powerful reporting features are useless if the information is incorrect.

As for Davis' comment that she lost access to Munis, Norita said Davis' system access was reduced to reflect her change in roles from a Tyler consultant to a government employee, and then to a private contracted consultant. Norita said access must be based on requested work only. She underscored the need for this limitation to benefit DOF as it requires the consultant to provide a "hands-on" training to DOF staff to learn and mirror how to resolve an issue while building self-sufficiency.

In terms of bank reconciliation, Norita said these issues could have been resolved earlier had the implementation team addressed them during the start of the Munis system.

Norita said when Davis was employed by DOF, this matter was left unresolved and it was only until the DOF leadership enforced this shift in priorities that this matter was addressed.

She said the move to new cash accounts was to improve better reconciliation of fund balances to cash accounts.

She noted that Davis was included in these discussions until she effectively resigned from her position as a government employee. Norita said Davis was not notified of further changes after her separation.



Norita

Mind in the Making (MITM) Training of Trainers in the CNMI

On February 20 to 23, 2024, the CNMI Brain Builders offered the Mind in the Making (MITM) Training of Trainers to partners, providers and parents. The MITM Training of Trainers, facilitated by Kim O'Connell, a MITM Master Facilitator, provided the opportunity for CNMI participants to complete the Seven Essential Life Skills Training Modules—a project of the Families and Work Institute. Throughout the week, the MITM Learning Modules allowed the participants the opportunity to reflect on their own experiences and practices, learn about what researchers have discovered about how children learn best, and discuss how to apply their learning to their role as parents, educators, or administrators. Towards the end of the training week, the participants were honored to be joined by the author and champion of Mind in the Making, Ellen Galinsky. Dr. Galinsky offered her time to answer several questions from training participants. Congratulations to all participants for completing the Mind in the Making Training of Trainers! They are now certified to offer the same training to their clients. MITM's newly certified trainers include:

- Christaine Manibusan and Cristina Caballero, CHCC Family-to-Family Program-MICAH
- Ira Sheila A. Valle, CHCC Population Health-MICAH
- Sanivette B. Sablan and Viktoria Buniag, CHCC H.O.M.E Visiting Program
- Bona Angeles & Elvie Pangilinan, Green Meadow School
- Maria Olopal, DCCA Division of Youth Services
- Zarah Pangelinan, Council on Developmental Disabilities
- Kiara C. Borja and Marvin Ngeskebei, DICE Pacific Professional Solutions, LLC
- Jeufan Benson, Parent
- Joy M. Maratita and Carla Sablan, Northern Marianas College, UCEDD
- Jesusa B. Calvo, Sinapalo Elementary School, Filipino Community of Rota, and @Puesto
- Robin Aquino Romero, CNMI WIC Program
- Elsie Tilipao-Rebuenog, NMPASI
- Donna Elena M. Ogo, CCDF Rota
- Arsene M. Borja, CCDF Tinian

Each of the MITM Learning Modules offer transformational learning that engages professionals in an experimental process of self-reflection and self-discovery to explore their own competence in each of the executive function-based life skills. It connects adults' experiences to the research on the skills in children's lives—why it's important, how it develops, and how it can be promoted. It employs specific evidence-based activities that participants can use to promote the skill in children. Lastly, it allows each participant to create action plans to promote the skills in themselves and in children.

The MITM Learning Modules are as follows:

Introduction Module
The Seven Essential Skills Training Modules are a set of eight modules that share the science of early learning to build children's academic and lifelong success. Each module covers one of the essential skills, and an introductory module provides a broad overview.

- 1. Focus And Self Control**
Children need this Life Skill to achieve their goals, especially in a world that is filled with distractions and information overload.
- 2. Perspective Taking**
Perspective Taking goes far beyond empathy; it involves figuring out what others think and feel, and forms the basis of children understanding the intentions of their parents' teachers' and friends. Children who can take others' perspectives are also much less likely to get involved in conflicts.
- 3. Communicating**
Communicating is much more than understanding language, speaking, reading and writing—it is the Life Skill of determining what one wants to communicate and realizing how our communications will be understood by others. It is the Life Skill that teachers and employers feel is most lacking today.
- 4. Making Connections**
Making Connections is at the heart of learning; figuring out what's the same, what's different and sorting these things into categories. Making unusual connections is at the core of creativity. In a world where people can Google information, those who can see the connections will go beyond knowing information to using it.
- 5. Critical Thinking**
Critical Thinking is the ongoing search for valid and reliable knowledge to guide beliefs, decisions, and actions.
- 6. Taking On Challenges**
Life is full of stresses and challenges. Children who are willing to take on challenges (instead of avoiding them or simply coping with them) do better in school and in life.
- 7. Self-Directed, Engaged Learning**
It is through learning that we can realize our potential. As the world changes, so can we, for as long as we live—as long as we learn. This training was made possible through funding from the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Care, CNMI Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Program under the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs.

For more information about Mind in the Making training and the CNMI Brain Builders initiative, email cnmibrainbuilders@evergreenlearning.org or follow them on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/cnmibrainbuilders/>.

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Healthcare provider wants lawsuit dismissed

By **KIMBERLY B. ESMORES**
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The St. Jude Renal Care Facility Inc. has asked the Superior Court to dismiss the lawsuit of a woman patient who had now passed away, arguing that no CNMI law allows a case to survive the death of a plaintiff.

Brien Sers Nicholas, on behalf of St. Jude Renal Care Facility, recently filed a motion for summary judgment that seeks to dismiss with prejudice Pilar Manglona Deleon Guerrero's lawsuit. She reportedly died on April 19, 2023.

In the lawsuit, Deleon Guerrero had claimed that her foot had been burned while she was being treated at the St. Jude Renal Care Facility.

Dismissal with prejudice means the case cannot be refiled.

"There being no laws in this Commonwealth allowing this case to survive the death of the plaintiff, the defendant is entitled to the granting of the foregoing summary judgment motion and a judgment... dismissing this case with prejudice," he said.

"This Commonwealth does

not have any statute allowing for survival of tort claims, including fraud claims, upon the death of a victim. As such, when the plaintiff took her last breath [respectfully speaking], this case also ceased to survive before this court as a matter of law. Accordingly, this case cannot continue to exist before this court and must be dismissed as a matter of law, said dismissal to be retroactive to when the plaintiff died on April 19, 2023," the lawyer added.

However, Deleon Guerrero's attorney, Michael Dotts,

is opposing the motion, arguing that modern common law allows claims to survive a plaintiffs' death.

"At the heart of the motion for summary judgment filed by the defendant is the argument that plaintiff's claims cannot survive her death. House Bill 23-61 that creates for CNMI residents the right to the survivorship of their claims has passed in the House and Senate and is now with the governor. It is anticipated that the statutory law will provide for the survivorship of claims, like those made by the plaintiff here, and it will be retroactive in its application. However, even if the law does not change, defendant here essentially relies on common law dating back to the late 1800s. The modern common law, properly interpreted, allows claims to survive claimant's death and this principle should apply here. Further, deferral to the common law as interpreted by courts on the United States mainland and then collected and edited by the American Law Institute was an unconstitutional abrogation by the CNMI Legislature of the ability of the courts of the CNMI to make our own common law," said Dotts.

Back in February 2022,

Deleon Guerrero filed a civil lawsuit against St. Jude Renal Care for negligence, negligent supervision, negligent training, and medical malpractice after a nurse allegedly placed a heat lamp beside her left foot that later left it severely burned, resulting in the amputation of her leg.

According to the lawsuit, Deleon Guerrero, who suffers from Type 2 diabetes, requires dialysis three times a week and has been undergoing dialysis at the St. Jude Renal Care Facility from 2015 to 2020.

During a February 2020 dialysis session, Deleon Guerrero said her lower body felt cold so she asked a nurse for a way to keep warm. However, instead of giving her a blanket, the nurse placed a heating lamp right next to Deleon Guerrero's left foot. Due to the exhaustion Deleon Guerrero experienced while undergoing dialysis, she fell asleep soon after the heating lamp was set up.

Due to her illness, Deleon Guerrero's foot was numb to the point that she does not feel pain. In this case, the heating lamp was allegedly placed next to her foot for an extended amount of time and was not removed for her entire dialysis session, which lasted four to five hours.

According to Dotts, none of the nurses or staff at St. Jude

gave Deleon Guerrero instructions on how to manage the lamp, when to contact a nurse, or to check on her feet after a certain period of time.

After her session, Deleon Guerrero's left toes were allegedly visibly charred by the heating lamp.

On Feb. 24, 2020, Dotts said that Deleon Guerrero went to the Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. to get the burn checked.

After numerous visits to CHCC, Deleon Guerrero's post-burn foot ulcer was removed on April 1, 2020. Due to complication of her diabetes, the healing process of her left foot was not successful and sometime in April 2020, the top of her second left toe allegedly fell off by itself.

Partial amputation of her left foot was performed on May 15, 2020.

Deleon Guerrero then had numerous follow-up appointments for her burn injury and amputation from May 2020 to December 2020 at CHCC, but the condition of her left foot did not improve following the amputation, in part due to her diabetes.

On Dec. 29, 2020, the removal of the dead tissue on her left toe was performed, but her left toe did not get better.

On Jan. 7, 2021, an operation was performed to remove

See LAWSUIT on Page 4

Camacho seeks to champion better business and community relations

By **CHRYSTAL MARINO**
chrystal_marino@saipantribune.com
CORRESPONDENT

Saipan Mayor Ramon Blas "RB" Camacho met with 20 business representatives from Precinct 1 last Thursday at the Saipan Mayor's Office in Susupe as part of efforts to create a better understanding between businesses and the community.

In the first meeting of its kind, business representatives from major resorts in the district such as Pacific Islands Club Saipan and Coral Ocean Point Resort, as well as the many supermarkets that cover the area, gathered and listened to Camacho's plan for a more close-knit community.

Camacho also asked those gathered to voice their concerns and ideas on how to help build a stronger and safer community. Topics such as crime, unemployment,

hiring complications, and the overall village cleanliness were discussed.

Camacho later said in an interview that this was part of his efforts to reach out to different groups that make up the Saipan community. He said he has already met with religious leader and different ethnic groups, "so now we're approaching the business community."

He said he is taking this extra step because many have not been used to working together in beautifying the villages and, creating a safe community.

Camacho said one of his goals is to start softball teams for young people in each precinct sponsored by businesses. He hopes not only to get young people involved but also establish a good relationship among business owners and community members. He shared that he's gotten positive

feedback so far.

"[We've gotten] a lot of positive signals from the business community. And they're so happy also to sponsor the softball game from Precinct 1 itself," he said.


He plans to bring this idea to businesses in other precincts too. He said businesses in Precinct 1 are willing to sponsor a softball team. The idea, he said, is to have businesses in all five precincts on Saipan being invited to also sponsor a team.

"I'm encouraging businesses to work together...because it will benefit...all of us...by promoting a safe community, safe village, and a clean island. ...I want the businesses also to be involved. ...These businessmen and -women consider this place as home already. ...So this is what we're trying to do, we're trying to connect everybody."

Camacho plans to meet with more business members in other precincts soon.



Camacho



NORTHERN MARIANAS TECHNICAL INSTITUTE
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Tel. No.: (670) 235-6684

Board of Trustee Vacancy Announcement

Details of this Vacancy:

This announcement is to fill the following vacancy for a:

- ☑ Tinian Representative (1) – VA #24-001
- ☑ Rota Representative (1) – VA #24-002
- ☑ Business Representative, Saipan (1) – VA #24-003
- ☑ Carolinian Descent Representative (1) – VA #24-004

For the new term set to expire March 11, 2026.

Qualifications for Board of Trustees:

Qualifications of a Board member consist of the following:

- ☑ A legal domiciliary of the CNMI and a U.S. Citizen.
- ☑ Of legal adult voting age within the CNMI.
- ☑ A demonstrated capacity for representing the CNMI's career and technical training fields relative to meeting the overall purpose of NMTI.

No person may become a Trustee while a CNMI government or NMTI employee, or until one year after the conclusion of CNMI government or NMTI employment.

Powers of NMTI Board of Trustees:

The Board of Trustees is the governing body of the Northern Marianas Technical Institute. It derives its power from and exists under Public Law 20-92. The Board has the power and responsibility to discharge any duty imposed by law upon it or upon the Institute, and will executive powers delegated by law to it or to the Institute.

How to submit interest:

To submit interest to serve on the Northern Marianas Technical Institute Board of Trustees, kindly email a letter of interest and your resume to: bot@nmtechcnmi.org

Due date:
Closing Date: 03/20/2024

Name: Gilbert I. Macaranas and Lourdes Macaranas
Address: P.O. Box 5379 CHRB
Saipan, MP 96950
Phone: (670) 785-9809

Pro Se

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

In the Matter of the	FCD-AD CIVIL
Petition for the	ACTION NO.
Adoption of:	24-0096
G.S.N.M.Jr.	
Minor Child(ren)	NOTICE OF HEARING
By:	
Gilbert I. Macaranas	
and Lourdes K. Macaranas	
Petitioner(s)	

Notice is hereby given that the above-entitled matter is set for a hearing on April 10, 2024 at 9:30 a.m. in Courtroom 217A before Associate Judge Teresa Kim-Tenorio.

Dated this 18th day of March, 2024.

Patrick V. Diaz
Clerk of Court
/s/
By: Deputy Clerk of Court



**DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
CNMI GOVERNMENT**

INVITATION TO BID

ITB NO.: DPW24-ITB No.: 42400068

SUBMISSION DATE: April 19, 2024 TIME: 10:00 A.M.

"Procurement of Services for Removal, Packaging, Containment, and Shipping of E-Waste Materials Collected at the Lower Base Transfer Station."

COPIES OF THE SPECIFICATIONS MAY BE OBTAINED AT THE TECHNICAL SERVICES DIVISION, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS, LOCATED ON SECOND FLOOR, OLEAI JOETEN COMMERCIAL CENTER, SAN JOSE, SAIPAN, DURING REGULAR WORKING HOURS.

THE PROVISIONS OF THE CNMI PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS, NMIAC SECTION 70-30.3-725 AND 70-30.3-730 PROHIBITING GRATUITIES, KICKBACKS AND CONTINGENT FEES SHALL APPLY.

The project package will be available on or after **March 19, 2024**, at Technical Services Division, Department of Public Works, located on Second Floor, Oleai Joeten Commercial Center, San Jose, Saipan. A non-refundable payment of **One Hundred Dollars (\$100.00)** is required for each set. Payment must be made to the CNMI Treasurer and a receipt of payment must be presented when obtaining the Scope of Work at the DPW Technical Services Division.

There will be a Pre-bid Conference for this project on **April 04, 2024, 9:00 a.m.** local time at the Solid Waste Management Division Conference Room, Lower Base Transfer Station, Saipan. The Prospective bidders are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the site. All question regarding this project must be submitted in writing no later than **4:30 p.m. local time on April 12, 2024** to **Mr. Anthony A. Camacho, Director of Technical Services Division**, 2nd Floor, Oleai Joeten Commercial Center, Saipan or fax to (670) 234-3547. Response to questions shall be shared with prospective bidders.

THE CNMI GOVERNMENT RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REJECT ANY OR ALL BIDS, OR PORTIONS THEREOF, AND WAIVE IMMATERIAL DEFECTS IF TO DO SO WOULD BE IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CNMI GOVERNMENT.

/S/RAY N. YUMUL
Secretary, DPW

/S/ BRIEN SERS NICHOLAS JR.
Acting Director, Division of Procurement Services

Man is accused of violating order of protection

By **KIMBERLY B. ESMORES**
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The Superior Court has imposed a \$10,000 cash bail on a man who is accused of violating a court order for protection when he allegedly harassed a woman and her daughter last Wednesday.

During a bail hearing last Friday, Superior Court Associate Judge Joseph N. Camacho imposed a \$10,000 cash bail on Augustin Blas Pangelinan Jr., who was arrested last week. Pangelinan appeared virtually from the Commonwealth Health Center. It was not immediately learned why he was at the hospital.

Pangelinan, 48, faces charges of violating an order for protection, assault, domestic violence, theft, vandalism, and disturbing the peace.

After his hearing, Pangelinan was remanded back to Department of Corrections' custody. He was ordered to return to court on March 20 for a preliminary hearing while his arraignment was set for April 1.

According to court documents, DPS received a call last March 13 at around 2:23pm about a disturbing the peace incident at Te's Fish Market in San Vicente.

Police officer Rachel Ogu-moro met with the caller, Jo-

sephine Aguon, who told police that she called the police multiple times because her nephew, Pangelinan, had just harassed her daughter.

Aguon added that she was scared for her and her daughter's life as Pangelinan had violated a restraining order. The restraining order, also issued by Camacho, had expired in December 2023.

Aguon's daughter told Ogu-moro that she was putting ice into one of the ice chests earlier that day when she heard a male voice yell a profanity at her. When she turned around, she saw Pangelinan's car parked in the grassy area in front of Te's Fish Market so

she ran inside the fish market and locked the door.

The daughter told police that Pangelinan drove off but made a U-turn by a green colored sign and parked in front of the fish market again, rolled down his window, then started shouting for approximately two minutes before leaving.

Police learned that Pangelinan is one of the owners of Te's Fish Market while Aguon, Pangelinan's sister, is currently in charge of overseeing its daily operation.

Aguon had taken out a restraining order against Pangelinan pursuant to a family court case.

PALAUAN

From page 1

PCA's new president, and the other new officers are Thelma Mizer, vice president; Nancy Mengidab, treasurer; and Frances Marie Kintaro Xavier. They were sworn in by Whipps.

In a short interview with Tuti, he said he is looking forward to continue the already outstanding involvement of the organization in the community, such as donations to Karidat Social Services and the Joeten-Kiyu Public Library.

This year, he said, the association is considering adopting a bus stop and donating to the Palauan Evangelical Church. He shared that there are also some big projects in the works that the association is looking forward to unveiling for the community as soon as they are finalized.

As Tuti was the PCA president from 2017 to 2019, he said the role is already familiar to him and he feels that, with the experience and support of

the Palauan community, they can accomplish much.

"With the help of the Palauan community, we can achieve a lot more. There's nothing much that we can't do, if we only work together. That's what I conveyed tonight in my address to them, that without them I cannot do much, but with their support, we can continue to strive and make a good mark and representation in the CNMI," said Tuti.

Besides Whipps and his delegation from Palau, the other dignitaries present that night were Saipan Mayor Ramon Blas "RB" Camacho, House Speaker Edmund Villagomez (Ind-Saipan), and Department of Corrections Commissioner Anthony Torres.

The event itself brought over a hundred individuals to the ceremony, which culminated with a celebration where food, music, and culture were shared.

A longer version of this story is available at www.saipantribune.com

NMC enhances admission criteria for nursing program

To ensure the highest standards of excellence and preparedness among nursing students at Northern Marianas College, its Nursing Department has increased the grade point average requirement from 2.50 to 3.00 for admission into the college's nursing program for the fall 2024 Ad-

mission cohort.

This change will be applicable to NMC pre-nursing students who have successfully met prerequisite requirements and are on track to complete their required courses by the conclusion of the spring 2024 semester.

The application process for

admission to the fall 2024 cohort will commence in April 2024 and can be accessed at www.marianas.edu/nursing.

In addition to the GPA adjustment, the Nursing Program admission test will now be administered annually. Pre-nursing students completing their prerequisites by the end of the

summer session in 2024 must plan to take the admission test in June of the following year.

For more information, contact Rosa T. Aldan, Nursing Department chair, at rosa.al-dan@marianas.edu or Andrew Mendiola, administrative assistant, at andrew.mendiola@marianas.edu. (PR)

HOUSE

From page 1

and Sapp in contempt.

"I have reviewed the special committee's report, and...I hereby certify this statement of contempt to your office of the Attorney General for the purpose of prosecuting [Travilla and Sapp] in the Commonwealth Superior Court," the letter states.

When sought for comments if Travilla and Sapp will be

prosecuted in Superior Court, assistant attorney general James Kingman, who spearheads the white-collar crimes task force, replied that he could not comment on the matter.

A former report stated that the House committee had also found former Finance secretary David DLG. Atalig in contempt, but *Saipan Tribune* was unable to get a copy of the letter certifying the contempt findings.

Villagomez was quoted last week as saying that he would be certifying a statement of

contempt against the former Finance secretary.

According to a previous article in the *Saipan Tribune*, the special committee found Atalig in contempt for not responding to most questions relating to the previous administration's Building Optimism, Opportunity, and Stability Together grant program. Atalig repeatedly invoked his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination in responding to the questions.

Travilla and Sapp, who are

co-owners of the company that was hired to promote the BOOST program, had also invoked their Fifth Amendment right in responding to most of the committee's questions relating to the BOOST Program.

Shayne Villanueva of Roil Soil, who was also part of the team that marketed the BOOST program, was the first to be called before the committee and had also been cited for contempt after he also refused to answer the committee's questions.

TORRES

From page 1

delegate to the U.S. Congress in this coming November election.

The NMI Republican Party has yet to decide when to hold a primary to determine who between King-Hinds and John Oliver Gonzales will be their candidate for delegate.

Torres said in an interview during the Republican Party's caucus at the Garapan Central Park last week that King-Hinds, who is a lawyer, has a very good educational and

professional background.

"She's definitely a leader," the former governor said.

He said he worked with King-Hinds when she was the CPA board chair—"she took CPA to a whole new level"—and she had a very good relationship with the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Torres said King-Hinds has passion for taking care of the community, whether people on Rota, Tinian, or Saipan.

"She is an advocate of our community, our culture. She's a strong woman with leadership skills," Torres said.

Altogether, King-Hinds is a hard worker who does not shy away or back down from any hard work, he added.

"I'd seen her go toe to toe with DOD [Department of Defense], the best lawyers in the country. Yet she never backed down," said Torres, adding that King-Hinds knows the importance of fighting for the people of the Commonwealth.

The former governor was referring to King-Hinds' fight against DOD to stop them from using Tinian and Pagan for bombing practice. The lawyer also served as the

Commonwealth's lead negotiator for the divert airfield lease agreement between DOD and the CNMI.

Torres said King-Hinds was an integral part of the CNMI's success during arguments, debates, and discussions with DOD.

"She fights for the people of the Commonwealth. She's the best fighter that we have. And I'm proud to support her," Torres said.

"Just look at the way she presents or the way she argues things. She makes us proud, put it that way," he added.

MISSING

From page 1

and that she was last seen on March 16, at around 11am in Susupe near the Department of Corrections building.

Fortunately, at around 9:53am yesterday morning, police were able to locate Wessel and that she was safe and sound.

DPS did not provide any additional details.

Fortunately, Wessel did not suffer the same fate as the last missing individual reported, 67-year-old Jesus Pinaula Rios.

Rios, who went missing on Feb. 5, was found nearly a week later.

After days of searching, Rios' decomposing body was found beneath bushes near a compound across the Happy Market on Feb. 10, which au-

thorities interpret to mean he had been dead for a while.

Initially, Rios' death was treated as a homicide, but nearly two weeks ago, DPS Criminal Bureau Investigations commander Capt. Jeffrey Olopai stated that DPS no longer treats the case as a homicide because, based on the findings reported by a local examiner, there was no trauma to the body and there were no obvious signs of foul play.

Olopai noted that the medical examiner, whom he did not identify, did an external investigation on Rios' remains but performed no autopsy on the body.

"There was an external examination conducted on the deceased on Feb. 27, and from the findings of our local examiner, there was no indication of foul play; there was no trauma to the deceased at the time of the examination," he said.



CHRYSTAL MARINO

Republic of Palau President Surangel Whipps Jr. and first lady Valerie Whipps were among the dignitaries present for the Palauan Community Association-CNMI's officers induction ceremony last Saturday at the Garapan Central Park.



CHRYSTAL MARINO

Sporting their "One Love Palau" shirt Kaylani Shiro and Elsie Nge-wakl share a smile after the Palauan Community Association-CNMI's officers induction ceremony last Saturday at the Garapan Central Park.

LAWSUIT

From page 3

her left toe.

On Jan. 12, 2021, the plaintiff was referred to Guam to be seen by a foot specialist.

Due to a series of problems that allegedly originated from the burn injury she sustained at St. Jude, she went into surgery and her left leg below the knee was amputated in Guam on Feb. 22, 2021.

Dotts alleges that the infection that caused the amputation of Deleon Guerrero's left leg spread to her right leg, causing her to undergo amputation of her right leg above the knee.

Soon after, due to her wounds not healing properly, both of her legs were amputated a second time. The left leg was amputated a second time above the knee, and the right leg was amputated a second time to her mid-thigh.

PREPaRE Workshop 1 and 2 equip schools for Comprehensive Safety Planning and Intervention

The Public School System Mental Health recently hosted two workshops from Feb. 22 to 23 and March 7 and 8 titled PREPaRE, which stands for Prevent, Reaffirm, Evaluate, Provide, Respond, and Examine, aligned with High Quality School Emergency Operations Plans.

Workshop 1 of the PREPaRE program centered on Crisis Prevention, Preparedness and Comprehensive School Safety Planning, emphasizing prevention through recovery, while Workshop 2 centered on Crisis Intervention and Recovery and School-Based Mental Health Crisis Interventions, specifically addressing responses to acute and long-term traumatic stressors in school settings. Both two-day workshops gathered educators, administrators, and mental health professionals to



Participants of the Public School System Mental Health's recent Prevent, Reaffirm, Evaluate, Provide, Respond, and Examine workshop pose for a group photo.

enhance preparedness strategies and integrate cohesive safety plans for schools.

Throughout PREPaRE Workshop 1, attendees engaged in critical conversations and scenario-based exercises, highlighting the importance of

proactive crisis management. Emphasizing crisis prevention and intervention, participants learned to anticipate, plan, and intervene effectively, thereby mitigating traumatic impact and facilitating a return to normalcy post-crisis.

Mental Health Community Council vice chair Christine Cabrera remarked, "This workshop provides structure in an otherwise, possibly, chaotic response to any crisis. By promoting and fostering the importance of mental health support, all stakeholders are able and adept at providing the immediate needs of affected individuals in a timely manner."

Special considerations were a focal point of the workshop, particularly in reducing the impact of trauma and the diverse needs of students. This included intentional planning with teachers, administrators, special education aids, school counselors, and support staff. Additionally, the workshop emphasized the importance of prioritizing medical and basic needs as well ensuring physical health, perceptions of security safety, and attention to minimizing psychological trauma in responses are aligned.

Admiral Herbert G. Hopwood Middle School vice principal Dr. Ben Seman shared, "As a school administrator, I felt that it was my duty to my students and their parents/guardians, staff members and colleagues, as well as the community to attend and participate in the PREPaRE workshop to enhance my knowledge and skills on how to prevent and intervene with crises if and when it may occur. The workshop was a valuable experience and learning opportunity for my team and me."

The workshop provided insights into parent preparedness and psychological security annexes, empowering schools to identify and support at-risk students and staff while creating safe environments conducive to learning. "The workshop provides not just information but empowerment. By equipping you with a comprehensive framework, it empowers you to gather the necessary stakeholders and take decisive action in executing the response during an emergency," said Dr. Bobby Cruz, a leading expert in comprehensive school safety.

PREPaRE Workshop 2, held over two days, delved into Mental Health Crisis Interventions, providing invaluable knowledge and skills to address acute traumatic stressors in school environments. By providing immediate mental health crisis interventions and fostering a culture of psychological safety, the workshop empowered participants to better support students and staff in times of acute trauma, ultimately enhancing the overall safety and well-being of the school community.

Tinian Elementary vice principal April Manglona shared, "First, I'm grateful that we have a proactive and progressive mental health program, that serves as a vital advocate and shares awareness about the importance of balanced and healthy mental health conditions for our students, school, and communi-

ty, especially during and after crisis situations. Secondly, understanding the unique needs of students in our school will allow me to be PREPaRE to provide the right interventions, like coping skills, in order to minimize any short-term or long-term traumatic stressors.

Effective communication and warning strategies were also emphasized, highlighting the necessity of clear and timely communication before, during, and after a crisis event. The importance of student accountability and data protection, ensuring comprehensive tracking and response mechanisms during emergencies, was also a big factor in empowering schools to swiftly and effectively manage any unforeseen circumstances.

Overall, the PREPaRE workshop equipped participants with invaluable tools and strategies to enhance school safety planning, fostering resilience and preparedness within educational communities, with more opportunities in the upcoming months ahead. One of our six strategic priorities is providing safe and caring schools, and these workshops are truly aligned with that objective, ensuring that schools are equipped to handle crises effectively and promote the well-being of students and staff.

For more information about future workshops and resources, stay updated on our social media @haligi.aware on Instagram and PSS Mental Health on Facebook and YouTube. **(PR)**

MVA woos military market to the Marianas

The Marianas Visitors Authority continues to look for strategic ways to woo more service member visitors to the Marianas, noting that military R&R is a small but important niche market for the destination.

Most recently, the MVA joined other delegates from the Marianas at the Quality of Life EXPO 2024 last month in Guam, a travel show organized by Joint Region Marianas to showcase regional resources and services to military service members and their families. As of the last census, there were an estimated 22,000 service members stationed in Guam, with more military anticipated in coming years.

"The military market has always been on the MVA's radar, and we have consistently participated in preparations for the many, many R&R port calls that military ships have made over the decades," said MVA managing director Christopher A. Concepcion. "In fact, Saipan has built a very good reputation for being a beautiful, nature-based port call where our military personnel feel welcomed. With the military build-up in Guam and region, we are working closely with our military contacts to spread the word that Saipan, Tinian, and Rota are ideal places to relax with family, have adventures with friends, and rejuvenate."

The MVA joined 83 other vendors at last month's expo, include the Rota Mayor's Office, Aqua Resort Club, Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan, Triple J, Star Marianas Air, Let's Go Tour, Commonwealth Bureau of Military Affairs, and CNMI Small Business Development Center. The MVA shared promotional information and brochures



Zenella Sablan, right, of the Marianas Visitors Authority shares information about the Marianas at the Quality of Life EXPO 2024 on Feb. 24, 2024, at the University of Guam. The travel show was organized by Joint Region Marianas to showcase regional resources and services to military service members and their families.



Rota Mayor Aubry Hocog, second right, shares information about the island of Rota in the Marianas at the Quality of Life EXPO 2024 on Feb. 24, 2024, at the University of Guam. The travel show was organized by Joint Region Marianas to showcase regional resources and services to military service members and their families.

about the Marianas and MVA members. Over 2,200 individuals attended the event.

The MVA had also placed ads for January's Rota Marathon 2024 and this month's Skechers Saipan Marathon 2024 in the Guam publication of *Stars and Stripes*, the U.S. military news organization providing inde-

pendent news and information to the military community. The MVA also joined Joint Region Marianas and the Saipan Chamber of Commerce in organizing the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Quality of Life Program held on Saipan in December 2024, highlighting travel partnership opportunities. **(PR)**

Shiseido Academy in the Marianas this week

Multinational cosmetic company Shiseido is holding its 2024 Shiseido Professional Summer Academy on Saipan, the Marianas, this week.

Approximately 80 individuals arrived on Saipan yesterday, March 18, from South Korea via Jeju Air. The trip is handled by Thecome Tour and is supported under the Marianas Visitors Authority's MICE group program, which incentivizes large group travel to the Marianas for meetings, incentives,

conferences, and exhibitions.

"We want to extend a warm welcome to the Shiseido group and thank them for choosing the Marianas for their summer seminar this year," said MVA managing director Christopher A. Concepcion. "The Marianas is ideal for group events such as this, and our MICE group program is an opportunity to incentivize more large groups and companies to make our islands their destination of choice."

The group, lodging at Hyatt Regency Saipan, will also take an island tour during their visit and enjoy free time on their final day before departing on March 21.

The 2024 Shiseido Professional Summer Academy is being held in the Marianas on March 18-21, 2024, with approximately 80 participants from Korea. The group tour is supported in part by the Marianas Visitors Authority MICE group program. **(PR)**

Opinion

Hafa Adai!

Saipan Tribune

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EDITORIAL

The US needs more legal immigration, not less

Over the past three years, the surge of unauthorized immigrants crossing the southern border has overwhelmed local communities, strained the resources of big cities and become a major political liability for President Joe Biden. Worse, the government's failure to stop illegal entries is draining public support for immigration of all kinds—and in the process threatening America's long-term economic growth.

Of the 7 million people apprehended at the southern border since the start of Biden's presidency, some 2.4 million have been released into the US to await court hearings on their eligibility for asylum. That's more than triple the number allowed into the country under former President Donald Trump. The accompanying spike in asylum-seekers relocating to northern cities has helped make immigration the top concern of voters heading into the presidential election. In his State of the Union address, Biden endorsed bipartisan border-security legislation that has broad public support but has been blocked by Republicans.

Given the government's failure to control the border and impose order on the system, it's unsurprising that public attitudes toward immigration in general have soured. The longer the chaos persists, the harder it will be to build support for the sensible policies the US needs to compete. That's a worrisome outcome, given the evidence about how immigration strengthens the US economy.

Estimates released last month by the Congressional Budget Office show that higher-than-projected immigration—due to both the record influx of asylum-seekers and the post-pandemic reopening of legal pathways—will expand the US labor force by 5.2 million workers over the next decade. That's because more than 90% of adult foreigners coming to the US are under 55, compared to 62% of the overall adult population. These workers should boost gross domestic product by about 0.2 percentage point per year over the next decade, adding \$7 trillion to the economy and contributing an extra \$1 trillion in taxes. Without this added growth, the projected federal deficit in 2034 would be 7.3% of GDP rather than 6.4%.

These findings add to other research on the benefits of immigration. New migrants currently account for 80% of US population growth; by 2042, they'll be the source of all of it. Once integrated into the economy, immigrants fuel growth by filling labor shortages and allowing companies to expand, revitalizing communities, boosting home values and creating new businesses.

Yet those contributions need to be balanced against the downsides of admitting unauthorized migrants on such a scale. Most of the income and job gains flow to immigrants themselves during their first few years in the country, while the rest of society bears the costs in the form of depressed real wages for unskilled workers and increased demand

See US on Next Page



When a dog bites, it's probably because you weren't paying attention

Nearly half of American households—about 45%—have at least one dog. Many puppies were adopted hastily during the pandemic, then improperly trained and socialized, so now they aren't functioning well. While these factors may be driving the increase in dog bites, most of these incidents can be prevented. Understanding dogs' body language, properly training your animals and not rushing to pet other people's dogs could go a long way toward reducing the likelihood of violent canine encounters.

Vicious attacks by aggressive dogs are outliers. Most bites result from animals being put under stress and humans not understanding their signals. Although dogs generally aren't dangerous, all of them—whether \$1,000-dollar labradoodles or shelter mutts—might bite if they are stressed enough. Of the 4.5 million dog bites reported in the U.S. each year, an estimated 80% happen at home, typically involving a dog and a human who have met before.

The human's story is often the same: The bite came out of nowhere. But there are almost always signs. We are just bad at reading them. Everyone knows to back away from a growl, but dogs usually communicate their discomfort long before reaching that point.

Dog aggression occurs on a ladder. Initial signs of discomfort might include lip-licking, looking away or yawning. Then dogs will escalate a step to behaviors such as stiffening up, staring or crouching with a tucked tail. When even the most conscientious dog owners don't recognize the signs, then, seemingly out of nowhere, the dog reaches the top of the ladder, feeling left with no choice but to bite that handsy toddler or overzealous house guest. A dog that is poorly socialized or in pain will escalate far faster than a well-adjusted, healthy one.

Sometimes, though, there are no signs before a dog begins lunging and biting. That happens when the animal's attempts to communicate are repeatedly punished—common in aversive training, which penalizes bad behavior with physical tools such as collars that deliver electronic stimulation, prong collars that dig into the skin and choke chains that constrict the neck. While not backed by science, this approach is still used in the unregulated dog-training industry.

Aversive techniques seem to work, but that's deceptive. Fear-based learning can push dogs to stop engaging in any behavior, good or bad, because they are afraid to make a mistake and risk pain. This shutting down happens quickly and is easily mistaken for good behavior. But no growth has taken place, only intimidation and loss of trust, leaving a dog in the corner with no voice.

By **MELONIE SAN PIETRO**
Los Angeles Times

Melonie San Pietro has a master's degree in canine science and owns a small dog-walking business in Washington, D.C.



The consequences often surface through aggression, fear, anxiety and biting that seems to come out of nowhere if you've missed the signs. Fortunately, it is easy to recognize shut-down dogs: They are avoidant and disengaged, and appear stiff or cautious.

Effective techniques do not lean on physical punishment. Positive reinforcement training, the method backed by the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior, rewards dogs for what they do right, motivating good behavior via treats, toys, verbal praise and other options.

While you can teach basic commands like "sit" and "stay" in a day, solving more complex behavioral issues is a lifetime endeavor. The improvements may be too subtle to notice, unlike the seeming quick fixes of aversive training. But puppies that have proper training are better-adjusted throughout their lives.

And even good training is still only one-way communication through which dogs learn to listen to us. We also need to listen to them. On top of understanding the signals that lead to bites, it's wise to remove a dog from a situation where it is displaying signs of distress. Dogs need a safe space at home to escape to when overwhelmed, especially in households with young children.

Finally, we should set and observe boundaries around petting. Don't feel obligated to let other people pet your dog. Let's also stop obsessing over petting other people's dogs as soon as we meet them—and teach our children the same. Despite social media trends advising us to "pet all the dogs," many are barely tolerant of strangers' hands on them. Dogs that want your attention make it known, approaching with a wagging tail, soft eyes and a loose, wiggly body. If you're the one who has to initiate the interaction, a good rule of thumb is: Don't.

We love our dogs. We're also responsible for them. We should respect all dogs as individuals with their own history, personality and triggers. Get to know their limits, meet them where they are, and you won't give them a reason to send you to the ER.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Letters to the editor must include the NAME, VILLAGE ADDRESS, and CONTACT NUMBER of the contributor. Letters that do not have these information will immediately be trashed. Contributions consisting of 500 words or less have more chances of getting published. The Saipan Tribune reserves the right to publish a contribution or not; the right to edit submissions for length, accuracy, and clarity; and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be sent via snail mail to the 2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, 96950; fax (670) 235-3740; e-mail to editor@saipantribune.com; or through our website at www.saipantribune.com.

Biden and Netanyahu are going from frenemies to enemies

You know frenemies are becoming enemies when they're drawing each other red lines. That's what President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu are now doing. Just over five months after Oct. 7, when Hamas terrorized Israel and Biden promised his unequivocal support, the two leaders, if not yet their countries, are preparing to split.

The first to pull out the metaphorical red marker was Biden. For months, he's been distraught at what he called the "indiscriminate" Israeli bombing of Gaza in its retaliation against Hamas, a campaign that has killed more than 30,000, wounded more than 70,000 and left nearly all of Gaza's 2 million people homeless, hungry and traumatized. He's also angry that Israel hasn't let in more humanitarian aid. And he's livid that Netanyahu and his right-wing coalition partners are snubbing Biden's long-term vision for peace, which culminates in a sovereign Palestinian state.

So Biden warned Bibi, as Netanyahu is known, that invading Rafah, where about half of Gaza's displaced population now huddles, would be a red line. The president didn't spell out what consequences its crossing would bring, and his national-security staff subsequently tried to soften the message. But Biden has now cast the relationship in a new hue.

Bibi then whipped out his own marker and escalated, as is his wont. (He once physically drew a red line at the United Nations as a visual aid.) He retorted that he will certainly send the Israeli army into Rafah, because he too has a red line, which is to make sure that "Oct. 7 doesn't happen again." That's sophistry: Biden doesn't want another Oct. 7 either. The question is when collateral damage becomes collective punishment of Palestinians, and thus a crime under international law.

And so a bilateral relationship that stretches back three quarters of a century faces unprecedented strain. More than in 1956-57, when President Dwight Eisenhower forced Israel to withdraw from Egyptian territory, even threatening to stop all aid to Israel. And more than in 1982, when Ronald Reagan called up Menachem Begin, the Israeli prime minister at the time, and ordered him to stop the mass bombing of Beirut: "Menachem," Reagan said, "this is a holocaust." Both times, the Israeli side heeded the US.

Netanyahu, by contrast, is unlikely to yield. His own recalcitrance and solipsism are too extreme, as is the ideology of his coalition partners, who in effect want an apartheid-style permanent reoccupation of Gaza. The relationship increasingly looks like dialectic when it fails: Instead of thesis and antithesis eventually producing a synthesis, the clash just leaves both sides alienated,

from each other and from the rest of the world.

In the process, the contradictions in Biden's policy are becoming too glaring to overlook. Just look at the skies above Gaza: It's in large part American bombs that the Israelis are dropping, even as the US is simultaneously parachuting boxes of meals, water bottles and medicine on Gazan beaches. (It will also build a floating pier to bring in more aid by sea.) The White House acknowledges that these efforts resemble Band-Aids after open-heart surgery. Adding irony to injury, some of the humanitarian air drops have even killed Gazans by accident.

So Biden had to strike a new tone. But is a red line the best way? It's a hackneyed metaphor, and one that's landed a lot of people in trouble. When Biden was vice president under Barack Obama, the latter drew a red line against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, to deter the dictator from using chemical weapons against his own people. But when Assad did just that, Obama didn't retaliate.

That's the problem with red lines: If you just spray-paint pinkish blurry areas you don't intend to enforce, you lose even more credibility and clout. To be taken seriously, by contrast, you must act when the red line is crossed, even if you don't really want to. Netanyahu, having drawn his line, will probably go into Rafah and cause more suffering. Biden, seeing his own line crossed, must then do something.

I've already suggested a first step: The US should stop vetoing resolutions in the UN Security Council that call for an immediate ceasefire.

An additional step is the one Eisenhower threatened: curtailing or pausing American aid to Israel. Eight US senators have written Biden demanding exactly that, arguing that arming Israel

By ANDREAS KLUTH
Bloomberg Opinion

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violates a law barring support for nations that restrict the delivery of humanitarian aid. Biden wouldn't even have to be so drastic. He could keep supplying Israel with defensive systems (such as Iron Dome, which protects against incoming missiles) but cut off offensive arms. Or he could attach conditions to their use, as the US does when equipping other countries.

The next measure would be, for lack of a better word, regime change. Biden is a true and life-long friend of Israel. His problem is with Netanyahu and his coalition, whom plenty of Israelis also want to drive from office. So Biden could address the Israeli population directly. His vice president, Kamala Harris, already welcomed Netanyahu's main rival, Benny Gantz, at the White House the other day, even though Netanyahu had tried to prohibit Gantz, a member of his "war cabinet," from visiting.

Any and all of these measures would be an escalation by Biden. But it wouldn't be a unilateral escalation. Having talked tougher on Israel in his State of the Union address and then drawn his red line, Biden must follow through, if he wants to prevent a terrible conflict from becoming even worse.

A far cry from a fair share

As tax day approaches, it's a good time to reflect on the societal agreement that our nation funds necessary things through our tax dollars and that taxes should be progressive—placing greater obligation on those with the most ability to pay.

Unfortunately, the wealthy seldom pay their fair share. At times, it can feel like our country has two different tax systems: one for everyday people who work for their income and another for those whose money comes from investments, inherited wealth or gaming the system with a bevy of corporate tax attorneys.

Not only is the system rigged, the distribution of need in this nation underscores the unfairness. Seniors lack proper care, families face piles of medical debt, and parents struggle with unconscionable choices like buying food or life-saving medicines for their sick kids. Housing is unaffordable for many, and homelessness is getting worse. Schools are in desperate need of supplies. Even broad societal threats like accelerating and devastating climate-related catastrophes and epidemics of drug overdoses are hitting communities harder.

The yawning divide between the haves and the have-nots couldn't be more apparent. It nags every person who hears about a billionaire paying a lower tax rate than a teacher or firefighter. When we have so much need, was it right for the richest people in the country to get a tax cut from 39.6% to 37% through the 2017 tax package?

Obviously not. Maybe if the United States taxed the rich more, we could nurture people's success by paying for daycare so it's easier to get ahead in the workforce.

What about the multimillionaires who pass fortunes to their heirs without being subject to the estate tax? It's infuriating that the 2017 Trump tax giveaways doubled the threshold for estates subject to the tax. Given inflation, those estates excluded can be worth around \$13 million for individuals and \$25 million for couples.

Similarly, it boils one's blood to hear about multinational corporations' legal teams using accounting maneuvers to outsource investments and slash their tax bills, schemes bolstered by the international provisions of Trump's 2017

By SUSAN HARLEY
InsideSources.com

Susan Harley is the managing director of Public Citizen's Congress Watch division. She wrote this for InsideSources.com.



tax law. Along with the domestic corporate tax rate cut from 35% down to 21% in that same tax package, big business got quite a gift that December.

And let's not forget the Wall Street titans who made record profits while the rest of the country suffered a pandemic-fueled economic crisis. Stocks are overwhelmingly owned by the very wealthy. Thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act, stock buybacks are now taxed, but Wall Street still doesn't pay a real sales tax on its stock trades (called a financial transaction tax), while everyday people shopping on Main Street pay sales tax on essential goods like soap, jackets and shoes.

Even though President Joe Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act, which instituted a minimum corporate tax of 15% on billion-dollar companies, corporate America has a long way to go before it is paying its fair share. Luckily, the tide could be turning toward a more progressive tax code to fund investments that tackle inequality.

Biden's State of the Union and recent 2025 budget proposal outlined changes to the tax code that would enhance fairness. These include increasing tax rates on corporations and wealthy individuals, closing loopholes that benefit mega-millionaires, and ensuring the IRS has the resources to go after tax cheats. Although Biden provided a strong vision of tax fairness, some progressive sources of revenue, like a Wall Street tax, were left off his list.

As the nation's leaders debate tax reform fueled by expiring provisions of the 2017 tax law, we all must recommit to a shared vision to unrig our tax code and invest in American communities.

US






From Page 6

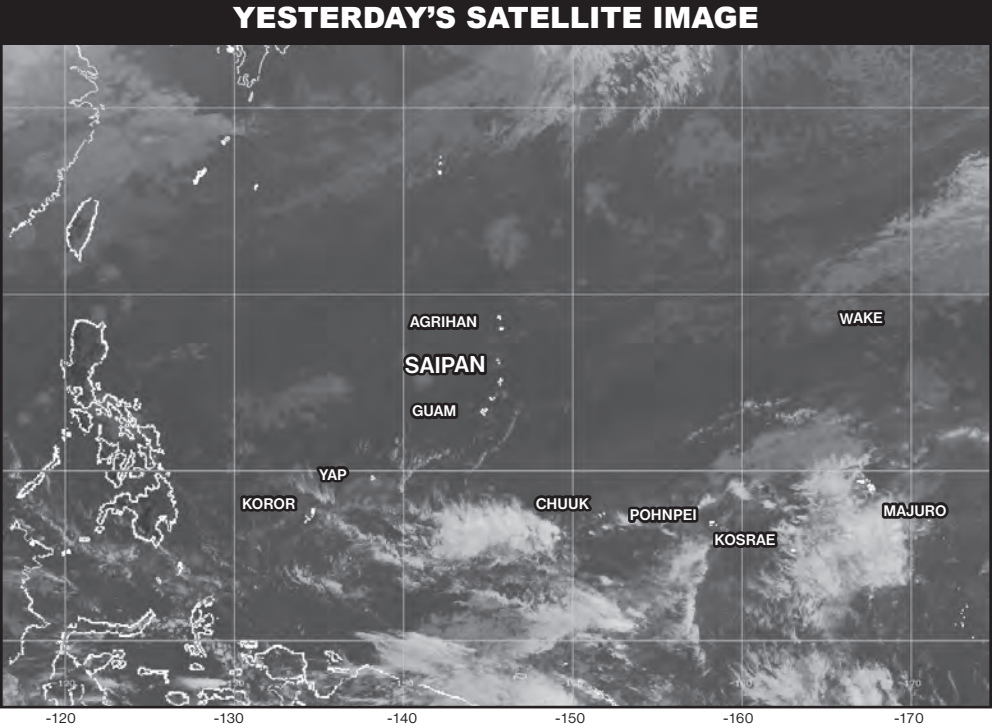
for services like education, health care and temporary housing. There's some evidence that this dependence diminishes over time—a recent government report found that from 2005 to 2019, asylum-seekers, refugees and their families cost \$723.4 billion in government services, while contributing \$739.4 billion in tax revenue—but the short- and medium-term costs are still huge.

What's needed is a more orderly system that greatly restricts unauthorized entries while expanding legal pathways for immigrants to come to the US to work. Funding for border security agencies and asylum processing should be increased and standards should be toughened, with applicants required to file claims before reaching the border. At the same time, the US should boost the number of workers admitted legally in high-need fields that face labor shortages, such as nursing, home health care and farming. Reallocating visas to prioritize technical skills and expertise, rather than family ties, and eliminating per-country caps on employment-based green cards would attract global talent, spark innovation and boost competitiveness.

Such reforms to expand legal immigration may be a hard sell until the border crisis is solved. For the sake of the country's future, lawmakers have a responsibility to get serious about both.

The Weather

5-DAY FORECAST FOR SAIPAN AND TINIAN									
TODAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY	
									
Partly cloudy with isolated showers. Northeast winds 10 to 15 mph.		Partly cloudy with isolated showers. Northeast winds 10 to 15 mph.		Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of showers.		Breezy during the daytime hours. Mostly cloudy with a 30 percent chance of showers.		Breezy during the daytime hours. Mostly cloudy with a 30 percent chance of showers.	
87	76°	87	76°	87	76°	87	75°	87	75°



PICTURE TIME: 6:00 AM MONDAY, MARCH 18, 2024

Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

Gentle to moderate trades prevail. Satellite imagery indicates some dissipating clouds over the waters. Tanapag buoy shows seas are around 6 feet.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: <https://www.weather.gov/gum/>

MICRONESIA			▲▼ °F
Guam and Rota	Showers	86° / 76°	
Palau	Thunderstorms	85° / 78°	
Yap	Thunderstorms	87° / 80°	
Chuuk	Thunderstorms	85° / 80°	
Pohnpei	Windy	86° / 79°	
Kosrae	Windy	86° / 79°	
Majuro	Partly Cloudy	84° / 79°	

DAY	SUNRISE	SUNSET
Today	6:21 AM	6:27 PM
Wednesday	6:21 AM	6:27 PM
Thursday	6:20 AM	6:28 PM
Friday	6:19 AM	6:28 PM
Saturday	6:18 AM	6:28 PM

DAY	MOONRISE	MOONSET	MOONRISE
Today	-	2:14 AM	1:35 PM
Wednesday	-	3:03 AM	2:29 PM
Thursday	-	3:46 AM	3:21 PM
Friday	-	4:26 AM	4:10 PM
Saturday	-	5:02 AM	4:57 PM

AROUND THE GLOBE			▲▼ °F
Auckland	Partly Cloudy	70° / 61°	
Beijing	Fair	57° / 33°	
Hong Kong	Partly Cloudy	77° / 68°	
Honolulu	Showers	79° / 71°	
London	Showers	57° / 43°	
Los Angeles	Showers	60° / 48°	
Manila	Fair	91° / 79°	
Melbourne	Mostly Cloudy	86° / 63°	
Miami	Mostly Sunny	79° / 73°	
New York	Cloudy	60° / 49°	
Osaka	Fair	59° / 45°	
Paris	Partly Cloudy	63° / 45°	
Busan	Fair	68° / 43°	
Rome	Mostly Sunny	66° / 45°	
Salem	Cloudy	80° / 61°	
San Francisco	Partly Cloudy	54° / 45°	
Seoul	Sunny	54° / 28°	
Tokyo	Sunny	69° / 47°	
Washington, DC	Partly Cloudy	71° / 51°	

TIDES: SAIPAN HARBOR TODAY			FEET
5:22 AM	High Tide	1.57	
10:34 AM	Low Tide	1.22	
2:28 PM	High Tide	1.43	
10:27 PM	Low Tide	0.02	

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF MARCH 1, 2024

DEPARTURES				ARRIVALS			
SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)				GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN			
UA076	9:50AM	10:35AM	Daily	UA174	8:00AM	8:45AM	Daily
SAIPAN- NARITA (NRT)				NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN			
UA824	7:05AM	9:45AM	1, 3, 5	UA825	9:25PM	2:00AM+1	2, 4, 7
GUAM-MANILA (MNL)				MANILA (MNL)-GUAM			
PR 111	5:55AM	7:55AM	Daily	UA189	00:40AM	6:30AM	3, 6
UA193	7:50PM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Palau	PR110	10:05PM	3:55AM+1	Daily
UA183	7:55PM	9:50PM	Daily	UA192	10:40PM	6:30AM+1	2, 5 via Palau
				UA184	10:55PM	4:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7
SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)				MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN			
7C3403/2305	4:40AM	10:20PM	Daily	UA189/174	00:40AM	8:45AM+1	3, 6 via Guam
UA076/183	9:50AM	9:50PM	Daily via Guam	UA192/174	10:40PM	8:45AM+1	2, 5 via Palau, Guam
UA076/193	9:50AM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Guam, Palau	UA184/174	10:55PM	8:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7 via Guam
				7C2306/3406	11:15PM	3:30PM+1	Daily
SAIPAN-INCHEON (ICN)				INCHEON (ICN)-SAIPAN			
TW308	2:15AM	6:10AM	Daily	7C3462	08:00AM	1:30PM	Daily Feb 7-16 only
7C3403	4:40AM	8:35AM	Daily	7C3406	10:10AM	3:30PM	Daily
7C3405	4:35PM	8:25PM	Daily	TW307	7:45PM	1:15AM+1	Daily
				7C3404	10:15PM	3:35AM+1	Daily

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); UA United Airlines; PR, Philippine Airlines; TW, T'Way Air; OZ, Asiana Airlines; 7C, Jeju Air; BX, Air Busan • ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. *(The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)*

STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 2, 2024

SAIPAN TO ROTA					
FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1301	SAIPAN	ROTA	08:30	09:00	Daily
1302	SAIPAN	ROTA	10:30	11:00	Daily
1303	SAIPAN	ROTA	15:30	16:00	Daily
ROTA TO SAIPAN					
FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3101	ROTA	SAIPAN	9:30	10:00	Daily
3102	ROTA	SAIPAN	11:30	12:00	Saturday & Sunday
3103	ROTA	SAIPAN	13:30	14:00	Monday To Friday
3104	ROTA	SAIPAN	16:30	17:00	Daily
ROTA TO GUAM					
FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3401	ROTA	GUAM	11:30	12:00	Monday To Friday
GUAM TO ROTA					
FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
4301	GUAM	ROTA	12:30	13:00	Monday To Friday
SAIPAN TO TINIAN					
FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1201	SAIPAN	TINIAN	7:30	7:45	Daily
1202	SAIPAN	TINIAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
1203	SAIPAN	TINIAN	9:00	9:15	Daily
1204	SAIPAN	TINIAN	10:00	10:15	Daily
1206	SAIPAN	TINIAN	14:00	14:15	Daily
1207	SAIPAN	TINIAN	15:00	15:15	Daily
1208	SAIPAN	TINIAN	16:00	16:15	Daily
1209	SAIPAN	TINIAN	17:00	17:15	Daily
TINIAN TO SAIPAN					
FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
2101	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
2102	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:30	8:45	Daily
2103	TINIAN	SAIPAN	9:30	9:45	Daily
2104	TINIAN	SAIPAN	10:30	10:45	Daily
2106	TINIAN	SAIPAN	14:30	14:45	Daily
2107	TINIAN	SAIPAN	15:30	15:45	Daily
2108	TINIAN	SAIPAN	16:30	16:45	Daily
2109	TINIAN	SAIPAN	17:30	17:45	Daily

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Scientists endorse Hawaii, Guam bottomfish stock assessments

HONOLULU, Hawaii—Science advisors to the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council recently accepted two recent bottomfish stock assessments for the main Hawaiian Islands and Guam as the best scientific information available.

The assessments found the MHI deep-seven stock is not overfished and not experiencing overfishing, and the Guam stock is likely not overfished and likely not experiencing overfishing relative to reference points.

The council's Scientific and Statistical Committee endorsed the 2023 benchmark stock assessment and recommended the council initiate the process for setting an updated acceptable biological catch and specifying annual catch limits.

The assessment from the NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center used data from the Hawai'i Fishery Reporting System and the Bottomfish Fishery Independent Survey in Hawai'i survey, spanning fishing years 1949 to 2023. Significant improvements were made to catch data evaluation and standardization techniques, culminating in a robust modeling platform known as Just Another Bayesian Biomass Assessment. PIFSC incorporated adjustments based on feed-

back from the 2023 Western Pacific Stock Assessment Review, improving the assessment's reliability.

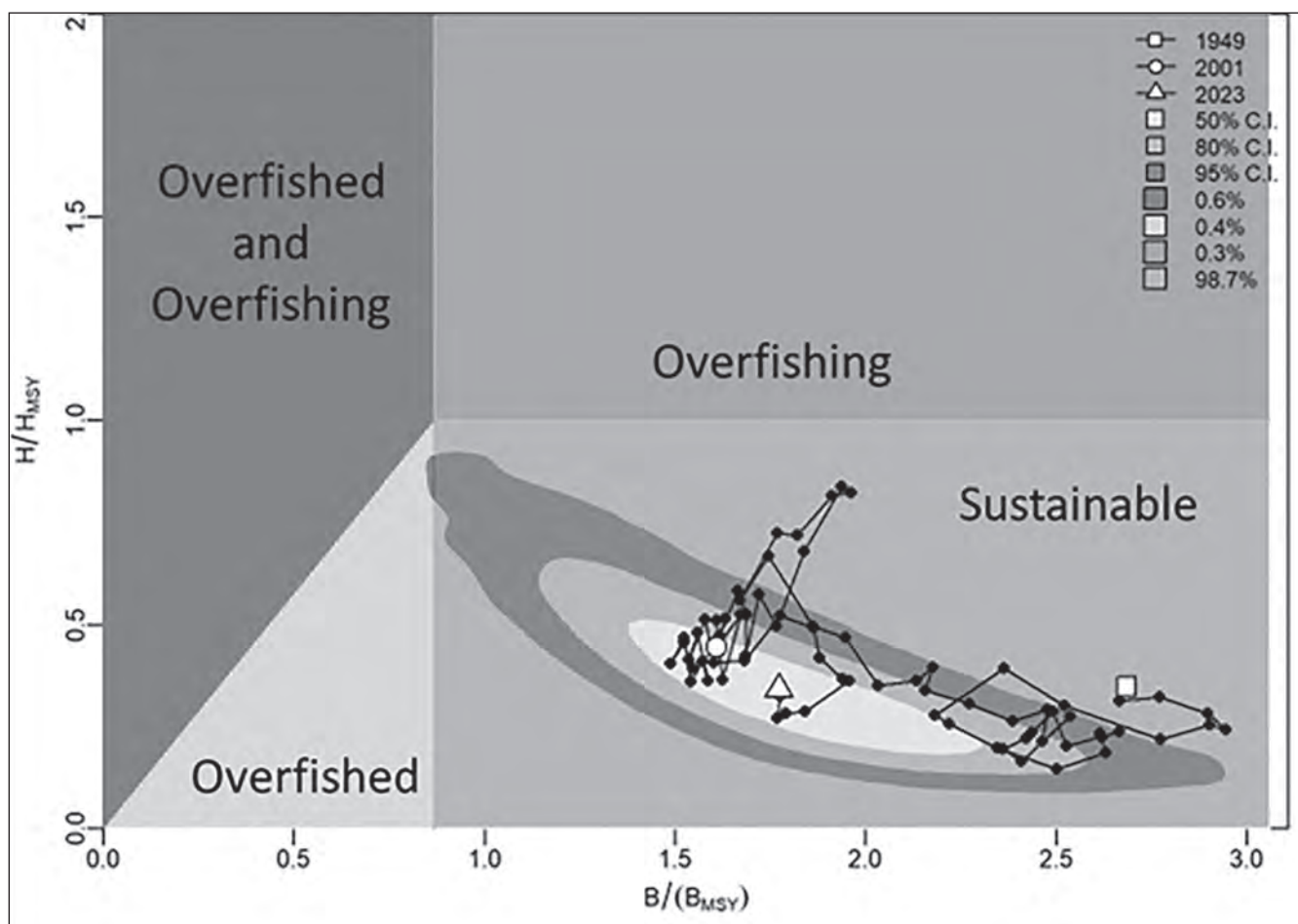
SSC members suggested upcoming assessments explore age-based models and conduct tests to check the accuracy of data standardization methods. They also voiced concerns about using data from the Hawai'i Marine Recreational Fishing Survey to determine fishing effort and proposed different ways to estimate catch levels from various sectors.

Regarding the Guam bottomfish fishery, the SSC accepted the 2024 assessment and recommended the Council determine if the ACLs for Guam bottom-

fish need revision within the current rebuilding plan. The fishery is operating under a rebuilding plan that addresses its previously overfished condition based on the 2019 assessment. It uses an associated ACL of 31,000 lbs to rebuild the stock.

The updated stock assessment includes data from 2018 to 2023 and highlights changes in species composition, notably an increase in onaga (longtailed red snapper, *Etelis coruscans*). The assessment indicates that while the stock is not currently overfished or experiencing overfishing, it hasn't yet reached sustainable yield levels, necessitating

» Also recommends approaches to survey false killer whales



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

This 2023 Kobe plot shows that the MHI deep-seven bottomfish stock is healthy (green area), not overfished or experiencing overfishing.

continued adherence to the rebuilding plan.

False killer whale management area

The SSC determined the available scientific information was not suitable for estimating the abundance of the Hawai'i offshore population of false killer whales in areas outside of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone. In 2023, PIFSC defined a new "management area" for the offshore pelagic stock that is known to inhabit areas both inside and outside of the EEZ around Hawai'i. The SSC adopted the report and recommendations from a working group tasked with reviewing the pelagic FKW management area approach.

The working group found the limited biological data outside of the EEZ were not sufficient to delineate a biologically based area that defines the pelagic stock, or for applying the modeling approach used to estimate the number of animals inhabiting that area. The SSC recommended the National Marine Fisheries Service not use the approach for any management purpose, and instead recommended prioritizing gathering additional tagging and genetic data outside of the EEZ.

Pelagic FKWs are known to take bait and catch from longline fishing gear, and may be accidentally caught in these fisheries. Most FKWs accidentally caught in the Hawai'i deep-set longline fishery are released alive. However, NMFS considers most of these interactions to be "serious injuries" if the hook or other part

of the longline gear is left on the animal. The abundance estimates for FKWs are used to estimate the maximum number of individuals that can be removed from a population without causing it to decline below a sustainable level.

Recent publication on gaps in biodiversity protection

The SSC discussed a presentation on a new scientific framework published in a recent scientific journal aiming to evaluate marine biodiversity across different spatial scales. The framework emphasizes identifying ecologically and societally important marine species, characterizing effective protection networks and using existing data. The authors' analysis found current U.S. marine protected areas contain only a fraction of the nation's marine biodiversity, with none meeting all criteria for effective protection.

However, the SSC highlighted the contentious nature of defining "protection" and raised concerns about the assumption that total area closures are the most effective means of protection. The SSC noted a total closure might not be as effective as technical measures for specific conservation and fisheries management objectives.

SSC members highlighted the importance of identifying threats to evaluate the effectiveness of conservation measures. They emphasized that threats like climate change and human activities are significant concerns for biodiversity pro-

tection, which may not be fully addressed by protected areas alone. Despite the report showing 97% of the biodiversity claimed to be protected in the United States is within the Western Pacific Region, the SSC asserted the report is not a fair assessment of conservation measures implemented throughout the nation.

The SSC recommended the council work with the Council Coordination Committee, comprising the eight regional fishery management councils, to ensure proposed conservation measures address identifiable threats and have measurable impacts in mitigating those threats.

The Scientific and Statistical Committee is made up of James Lynch (chair); Jason Biggs (Guam Division of Aquatic & Wildlife Resources); Debra Cabrera (University of Guam); Frank Camacho (University of Guam); Milani Chaloupka (University of Queensland); Erik Franklin (University of Hawai'i, School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology); Shelton Harley (Fisheries New Zealand); Jason Helyer (Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources); Ray Hilborn (University of Washington); Justin Hospital (National Marine Fisheries Service Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center); Dave Itano (Fisheries Consultant); Donald Kobayashi (NMFS PIFSC); Steve Martell (Sea State Inc.); Domingo Ochavillo (American Samoa Department of Marine & Wildlife Resources); Graham Pilling (The Pacific Community); Craig Severance (University

of Hawai'i at Hilo, retired); Francisco Villagomez (CNMI Division of Fish & Wildlife); and Charles Littnan (ex-officio) (NMFS PIFSC).

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council is made up of Secretary of Commerce appointees from nominees selected by American Samoa, the CNMI, Guam and Hawai'i governors: Will Sword, noncommercial fisherman/engineer (American Samoa) (chair); Roger Dang, Fresh Island Fish Co. (Hawai'i) (vice chair); Manny Dueñas, Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (Guam) (vice chair); Judith Guthertz, University of Guam (Guam); Pete Itibus, noncommercial fisher (CNMI); Shaelene Kamaka'ala, Hawaiian Islands Land Trust (Hawai'i); Matt Ramsey, Conservation International (Hawai'i); and Gene Weaver, CNMI Judiciary (CNMI). Designated state officials: Dawn Chang, Hawai'i Department of Land & Natural Resources; Sylvan Igisomar, CNMI Department of Lands & Natural Resources (vice chair); Chelsa Muña, Guam Department of Agriculture; and Archie Soliai, American Samoa Department of Marine & Wildlife Resources (vice chair). Designated federal officials (voting): Sarah Malloy (acting), NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office. Designated federal officials (nonvoting): Colin Brinkman, U.S. State Department; Brian Peck, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; and RADM Michael Day, U.S. Coast Guard 14th District. (PR)

Shape the future with your words!

Our stories commemorate the past, preserve our cultural identity, and entertain our family and friends! While we have a rich memory for stories from the past, and active imaginations to create fiction, the best way to ensure these stories live on in the future is to write them down!

Join the Marianas Writers Movement to write your stories. Writing with others can help with motivation and ideas. Come to our Write-in at the Joet-



en-Kiyu Public Library on Saturday, March 23, 2024 from 10am to 12pm. Bring your thermos (drink). We will have cookies.

This write-in is open to all (ages 10 and older) and free. Let's write together. (PR)

EARTHQUAKE BRIEFS

4.4-magnitude quake on Pagan

At 3:30am on March 18, 2024, a 4.4-magnitude earthquake occurred on Pagan, Northern Mariana Islands. Currently, there are no tsunami warnings or advisories that were issued by the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center.

For more information, please contact the CNMI EOC State Warning Point at (670) 237-8000. (PR)

4.9-magnitude quake in Piti

At 11:36pm on March 17 2024, a report of a 4.- magnitude earthquake occurred 111 kilometers Northwest of Piti Village, Guam. Currently, there are no tsunami warnings or advisories that were issued by the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center.

For more information, please contact the CNMI EOC State Warning Point at (670) 237-8000. (PR)

Business



New working group to tackle economic issues

KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

A newly established working group composed of members of the CNMI Legislature and members of the Saipan Chamber of Commerce aims to tackle economic and other issues the CNMI currently faces. Members of the new working group held a press conference last Thursday.

By **KIMBERLY B. ESMORES**
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

A newly-created working group composed of members of the Legislature and members of the Saipan Chamber of Commerce aims to tackle economic and other issues the CNMI currently faces.

The new working group met with the media last Thursday to introduce themselves, just weeks after meeting with the Guam leadership to discuss how they can work together to tackle issues that they similarly face.

Rep. Edwin Propst (D-Saipan) said Thursday that the working group was created to provide CNMI stakeholders and the local business community a space to share their ideas on how to deal with some of the CNMI's pressing needs. Some of the topics that have been discussed so far include economic recovery, land and sea transportation, interisland air service,

labor issues, and more.

"This effort in helping our community started with some discussions and reaching out to the Saipan Chamber of Commerce and [Hotel Association of the Northern Mariana Islands] in which the CNMI Legislature wanted to meet to discuss our pressing needs. The main issue is our economy and that's really what brought us together to talk about the real challenges [in the CNMI]," he said.

Propst said the group held its first meeting over a month ago and has since gone to Guam to discuss some of these issues with Guam leaders and lawmakers.

"We [have since] reached out to the Guam [Legislature] and have had a meeting. We [also] had a meeting with Guam Gov. Lou DeLeon Guerrero and Lt. Gov. Josh Tenorio...to discuss several important issues," he said.

Propst noted that during these meetings, a discussion

to revive the Mariana Islands Legislatures Association arose and the working group expects members of the Guam Legislature to travel to Saipan soon to sign a formal resolution re-establishing the group.

Chamber president Joe C. Guerrero said during the media conference that the establishment of this working group gives CNMI stakeholders a place to discuss their concerns and challenges with lawmakers and to possibly come up with ideas to resolve them.

"It's a great opportunity for us to really sit down and discuss issues, no politics involved, just saying it as it is. The business community is really here to help and share any ideas we may have and to find a way to move forward from these challenges. Many of these challenges are not new. So we [want to] sit down and share [our] ideas and information. This is what this group is about," he said.

China economy shows signs of improvement, but its property sector is still in the doldrums

HONG KONG (AP)—China's manufacturing and investment improved in the first two months of the year, while weakness in the property sector weighed on the economy, the National Bureau of Statistics said Monday.

The report said industrial output rose 7% from a year earlier in January-February, better than analysts had forecast. Spending on factories and equipment, known as fixed-asset investments, rose 4.2%.

The real estate sector remained sluggish, with investment in real estate falling 9% in January-February compared to the same period a year earlier.

The property market is "still in a state of adjustment

and transition" but policies outlined at China's annual legislative session earlier this month will promote "stable and healthy development," National Bureau of Statistics spokesperson Liu Aihua told reporters.

During the National People's Congress meetings, China's leaders pledged to refine property sector policies, including increasing financing to developers and building more affordable housing.

The signs of strength followed various moves by authorities to boost growth. The statistics bureau said retail sales climbed 5.5% and consumer prices rose for the first time since August. The consumer price index was up

0.7% in February after months of falling prices.

"Industrial production was a sizable beat, supported by strong exports in the month, while fixed assets investments on the other hand, were likely supported by a state-driven push early this year," said Louise Loo of Oxford Economics in a note.

She said consumer spending was "buoyed temporarily" by spending related to the Lunar New Year holidays, the biggest festival of the year, and that without added government spending it would be difficult to keep up strong growth.

Beijing has set an economic growth target of about 5% for 2024, which experts say may be challenging to reach.

Nation

ACROSS THE NATION

Supreme Court weighs how far federal officials can go to combat controversial posts on hot topics

WASHINGTON (AP)—In a busy term that could set standards for free speech in the digital age, the Supreme Court is taking up a dispute Monday between Republican-led states and the Biden administration over how far the federal government can go to combat controversial social media posts on topics like COVID-19 and election security. The justices

are hearing arguments in a lawsuit filed by Louisiana, Missouri and other parties accusing administration officials of leaning on the social media platforms to unconstitutionally squelch conservative points of view. Lower courts have sided with the states, but the Supreme Court blocked those rulings while it considers the issue. The high court is in the midst of a term heavy with social media issues. On Friday, the court laid out standards for when public officials can block their social media followers. Less than a month ago, the court heard arguments over Republican-passed laws in Florida and Texas that prohibit large social media companies from taking down posts because of the views they express. The cases over state laws and the one being argued Monday are variations on the same theme, complaints that the platforms are censoring conservative viewpoints. The states argue that White House communications staffers, the surgeon general, the FBI and the U.S. cybersecurity agency are among those who coerced changes in online content on Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and other media platforms. "It's a very, very threatening thing when the federal government uses the power and authority of the government to block people from exercising their freedom of speech," Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrill said in a video her office posted online. The administration responds that none of the actions the states complain about come close to problematic coercion. The states "still have not identified any instance

in which any government official sought to coerce a platform's editorial decisions with a threat of adverse government action," wrote Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar, the administration's top Supreme Court lawyer. Prelogar wrote that states also can't "point to any evidence that the government ever imposed any sanction when the platforms declined to moderate content the government had flagged — as routinely occurred." The companies themselves are not involved in the case.

Idaho considers ban on using public funds or facilities for gender-affirming care

BOISE, Idaho (AP)—Idaho lawmakers are expected to vote this week on a bill that would ban the use of any public funds for gender-affirming care, including for state employees using work health insurance and for adults covered by Medicaid. The legislation already passed the House and only needs to clear the majority Republican Senate before it is sent to Gov. Brad Little's desk, where it would likely be signed into law. The Republican governor has said repeatedly he does not believe public funds should be used for gender-affirming care. If the legislation is enacted, Idaho would become at least the 10th state to ban Medicaid funding for gender-affirming care for people of all ages, according to the advocacy and information organization Movement Advancement Project. The laws are part of an ongoing national battle over the rights of LGBTQ+ Americans. Opponents to the Idaho bill say it almost certainly will lead to a lawsuit in federal court. The state has already been sued multiple times over attempts to deny gender-affirming care to transgender residents and so far has not had much success defending the lawsuits. In one case, the state was ordered to provide a transgender inmate with gender-transition surgery, and the inmate was later awarded roughly \$2.5 million in legal fees. Last year a federal judge barred Idaho from enforcing its

newly enacted ban on gender-affirming medical care for minors until a lawsuit brought by transgender youth and their families is resolved. A different federal judge denied the state's motion to dismiss a separate lawsuit filed by adults in 2022 who said Medicaid officials wrongly denied coverage for their medically necessary gender-affirming treatment. "This bill violates the 14th Amendment equal protections clause" and the federal Medicaid Act, Boise attorney Howard Belodoff told lawmakers during a hearing on Thursday. Belodoff represents the transgender adults who sued the state over what they said were discriminatory Medicaid policies excluding coverage for genital reconstruction surgery.

3 people killed, infant in critical condition after SUV slams into bus shelter in San Francisco

SAN FRANCISCO (AP)—Three people were killed and an infant was hospitalized in critical condition after an SUV crashed into a bus shelter in San Francisco, authorities said Sunday. Two victims, including a child, died at the scene of the crash Saturday afternoon in the city's West Portal neighborhood, police said. Three others were taken to hospitals. The third victim, a woman, later died at a hospital, police said. The infant was being treated for life-threatening injuries, police said. The driver of the white Mercedes SUV was among those hospitalized, according to the San Francisco Chronicle. The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency said Saturday it was investigating the cause of the crash in collaboration with the San Francisco Police Department. San Francisco Mayor London Breed said on X, formerly Twitter, that she had visited the scene of the collision on Saturday. She called the incident "heartbreaking." Residents left flowers at a growing memorial where the crash occurred, the Chronicle reported. The advocacy group Walk San Francisco planned a vigil Monday evening at the site.

World

Putin basks in electoral victory that was never in doubt

MOSCOW, Russia (AP)—Russian President Vladimir Putin basked in a victory early Monday that was never in doubt, as partial election results showed him easily securing a fifth term after facing only token challengers and harshly suppressing opposition voices.

With little margin for protest, Russians crowded outside polling stations at noon Sunday, on the last day of the election, apparently heeding an opposition call to express their displeasure with Putin. Still, the impending landslide underlined that Russian leader would accept nothing less than full control of the country's political system as he extends his nearly quarter-century rule

for six more years.

Putin hailed the early results as an indication of “trust” and “hope” in him—while critics saw them as another reflection of the preordained nature of the election.

“Of course, we have lots of tasks ahead. But I want to

make it clear for everyone: When we were consolidated, no one has ever managed to frighten us, to suppress our will and our self-conscience. They failed in the past and they will fail in the future,” Putin said at a meeting with volunteers after polls closed.

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter: “The polls have closed in Russia, following the illegal hold-

ing of elections on Ukrainian territory, a lack of choice for voters and no independent OSCE monitoring. This is not what free and fair elections look like.”

Any public criticism of Putin or his war in Ukraine has been stifled. Independent media have been crippled. His fiercest political foe, Alexei Navalny, died in an Arctic prison last month, and other critics are either in jail or in exile.

Beyond the fact that voters had virtually no choice, in-

dependent monitoring of the election was extremely limited. According to Russia's Central Election Commission, Putin had some 87% of the vote with about 90% of precincts counted.

In that tightly controlled environment, Navalny's associates urged those unhappy with Putin or the war in Ukraine to go to the polls at noon on Sunday—and lines outside a number of polling stations both inside Russia and at its embassies around the world

appeared to swell at that time.

Among those heeding call was Yulia Navalnaya, Navalny's widow, who joined a long line in Berlin as some in the crowd applauded and chanted her name.

She spent more than five hours in the line and told reporters after casting her vote that she wrote her late husband's name on the ballot.

Asked whether she had a message for Putin, Navalnaya replied: “Please stop asking for messages from me or from

somebody for Mr. Putin. There could be no negotiations and nothing with Mr. Putin, because he's a killer, he's a gangster.”

But Putin brushed off the effectiveness of the apparent protest.

“There were calls to come vote at noon. And this was supposed to be a manifestation of opposition. Well, if there were calls to come vote, then ... I praise this,” he said at a news conference after polls closed.

Netanyahu snaps back vs. growing US criticism after being accused of losing his way on Gaza

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP)—Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu railed Sunday against growing criticism from top ally the United States against his leadership amid the devastating war with Hamas, describing calls for a new election as “wholly inappropriate.”

In recent days, U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, the highest-ranking Jewish official in the country and a strong Israel supporter, called on Israel to hold a new election, saying Netanyahu had “lost his way.” President Joe Biden expressed support for Schumer's “good speech,” and earlier accused Netanyahu of hurting Israel because of the huge civilian death toll in Gaza.

Netanyahu told Fox News that Israel never would have called for a new U.S. election after the Sept. 11 attacks in 2001, and denounced Schumer's comments as inappropriate.

“We're not a banana republic,” he said. “The people of Israel will choose when they will have elections, and who they'll elect, and it's not something that will be foisted on us.”

When asked by CNN whether he would commit to a new election after the war ends, Netanyahu said: “I think that's something for the Israeli public to decide.”

The U.S., which has provided key military and diplomatic support to Israel, also has expressed concerns about a planned Israeli assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where about 1.4 million displaced Palestinians are shel-

tering. The spokesman for the National Security Council, John Kirby, told Fox the U.S. still hasn't seen an Israeli plan for Rafah.

The U.S. supports a new round of talks aimed at securing a cease-fire in exchange for the return of Israeli hostages taken in Hamas' Oct. 7 attack.

The Israeli delegation to those talks was expected to leave for Qatar after Sunday evening meetings of the Security Cabinet and War Cabinet, which will give directions for negotiations.

Despite the talks, Netanyahu made it clear he would not back down from the fighting that has killed more than 31,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials. More than five months have passed since Hamas attacked southern Israel, killed 1,200 people and took another 250 hostage.

Earlier Sunday, Netanyahu said calls for an election now—which polls show he would lose badly—would force Israel to stop fighting and paralyze the country for six months.

Netanyahu also reiterated his determination to attack Hamas in Rafah and said that his government approved military plans for such an operation.

“We will operate in Rafah. This will take several weeks, and it will happen,” he said. The operation is supposed to include the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of civilians, but it is not clear how Israel will do that.

N. Korea resumes missile tests, raising tensions with its rivals after their military drills' end

SEOUL, South Korea (AP)—North Korea fired multiple short-range ballistic missiles toward its eastern waters Monday morning, its neighbors said, days after the end of the South Korean-U.S. military drills that the North views as an invasion rehearsal.

The launches—North Korea's first known missile testing activities in about a month—came as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was in Seoul for a conference. Outside experts

earlier predicted North Korea would extend its run of missile tests and intensify its warlike rhetoric ahead of the U.S. presidential election in November to boost its leverage in future diplomacy.

Japan's Defense Ministry said North Korea fired three missiles, two together at 7:44 a.m. and the other about 37 minutes later. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told a parliamentary session that the North Korean missiles landed in the waters

between the Korean Peninsula and Japan, all outside of Japan's exclusive economic zone, and that no damage or injuries have been reported.

Kishida denounced North Korea's repeated ballistic missile tests as acts “that threaten the peace and safety of Japan, the region and the international society.” He said Japan strongly protested against North Korea over its testing activities, saying they violated U.N. Security Council resolutions that ban

the North from engaging in any ballistic activities.

South Korea's military said it also detected “several” suspected short-range ballistic launches by North Korea on Monday morning. The Joint Chiefs of Staff called the launches “clear provocation” that threaten peace on the Korean Peninsula. It said South Korea will maintain readiness to repel any provocation by North Korea, based on its solid military alliance with the United States.

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THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

Life & Style

‘Kung Fu Panda 4’ repeats at No. 1 on the box office charts

By LINDSEY BAHR
AP Film Writer

“Kung Fu Panda 4” stayed at the top of the North American box office in its second weekend in theaters. The Universal and DreamWorks Animation movie earned \$30 million in ticket sales, according to studio estimates Sunday.

The franchise featuring the voice of Jack Black is responsible for over \$1.9 billion at the box office since it launched in 2008 and spawned several animated series, shorts, video games and a holiday special. The fourth installment, playing in 4,067 locations in North America, has already made \$107.7 million domestically.

There were several new movies arriving in over 1,000 theaters (or expanding) this

weekend, including Lionsgate’s Mark Wahlberg dog movie “Arthur the King,” Focus Features’ comedic satire “The American Society of Magical Negroes” and A24’s Kristen Stewart-led

Just The Facts

1. “Kung Fu Panda 4,” \$30 million.
2. “Dune: Part Two,” \$29.1 million
3. “Arthur the King,” \$7.5 million.
4. “Imaginary,” \$5.6 million.
5. “Cabrini,” \$2.8 million.
6. “Love Lies Bleeding,” \$2.5 million.
7. “Bob Marley: One Love,” \$2.3 million.
8. “One Life,” \$1.7 million
9. “The American Society of Magical Negroes,” \$1.3 million
10. “Ordinary Angels,” \$1 million.

bodybuilding thriller “Love Lies Bleeding.”

But the charts still belonged to the franchises, including “Dune: Part Two,” which came in a very close second in its third weekend, with \$29.1 mil-



This image released by Universal Pictures shows Po, voiced by Jack Black, in a scene from DreamWorks Animation’s “Kung Fu Panda 4.”

lion. That’s down only 37% from last weekend. It’s now made \$205.3 million domestically. The first film, which was released simultaneously in theaters and on streaming, capped out at around \$435 million globally, while “Part Two” is already at almost \$500 million worldwide.

“Arthur the King” did the best of the newcomers, landing

in third place with \$7.5 million from 3,003 locations. The studio went into the weekend expecting something in the \$8 million to \$10 million range. Its low production cost and international presales should yield profits. Directed by Simon Cellan Jones and written by Michael Brandt, the movie is based on the true story of an adventure racer who befriends

a stray dog on a perilous 435-mile trek in the Dominican Republic. Simu Liu plays one of Wahlberg’s teammates. With an A CinemaScore, the studio is hoping positive word of mouth will boost sales in the coming weeks.

“Love Lies Bleeding” opened in 1,362 locations to \$2.5 million. Written and directed by Rose Glass (“

Saint Maud”), it’s a pulpy ‘80s-set Western thriller about an isolated gym manager (Stewart) and a bodybuilder (Katy O’Brien) passing through town.

“The American Society of Magical Negroes” opened in 1,147 theaters and made an estimated \$1.3 million. According to exit data, 52% of the opening weekend audience was Black. The movie, written and directed by Kobi Libii, is a satire about a secret society of Black people dedicated to making white lives easier. Justice Smith and David Alan Grier star.

In the first weekend following the Oscars, “Poor Things” added \$2.3 million globally, bumping its total to \$112.6 million.

Next weekend, “Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire” will arrive in theaters, armed with proton packs and brand name recognition.

Second man is charged in connection with 2005 theft of ruby slippers worn in ‘The Wizard of Oz’

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP)—A second man has been charged in connection with the 2005 theft of a pair of ruby slippers that Judy Garland wore in “The Wizard of Oz,” according to an indictment made public Sunday.

Jerry Hal Saliterman, 76, of Crystal, Minnesota, was charged with theft of a major artwork and witness tampering. He did not enter a plea when he made his first appearance Friday in U.S. District Court in St. Paul.

The slippers, adorned with sequins and glass beads, were stolen from the Judy Garland

Museum in the late actor’s hometown of Grand Rapids, Minnesota, nearly 20 years ago and their whereabouts remained a mystery until the FBI recovered them in 2018.

The indictment says that from August 2005 to July 2018 Saliterman “received, concealed, and disposed of an object of cultural heritage”—specifically, “an authentic pair of ‘ruby slippers’ worn by Judy Garland in the 1939 movie ‘The Wizard of Oz.’” The indictment says Saliterman knew they were stolen, and that he threatened to release a sex tape of a woman

and “take her down with him” if she didn’t keep her mouth shut about the slippers.

Saliterman was in a wheelchair and on supplemental oxygen during his Friday court appearance. His oxygen machine hummed throughout the hearing and he bounced his knee nervously during breaks in the proceedings. He responded with “yes,” when U.S. Magistrate Judge Elizabeth Cowan Wright asked whether he understood the charges against him, but he said nothing about the allegations.

The case was not openly

discussed in court. The magistrate ordered Friday that the indictment be unsealed, but it did not become publicly available until Sunday.

Saliterman’s attorney, John Brink, said after Friday’s hearing that he couldn’t say much about the case, but: “He’s not guilty. He hasn’t done anything wrong.” Saliterman, who was released on his own recognizance, declined to comment to The Associated Press outside the courthouse.

The man who stole the slippers, Terry Jon Martin, 76, pleaded guilty in October to theft of a major artwork,

admitting to using a hammer to smash the glass of the museum’s door and display case in what his attorney said was an attempt to pull off “one last score” after turning away from a life of crime. He was sentenced in January to time served because of his poor health.

Martin’s lawyer said in court documents that an old associate of Martin’s with connections to the mob told him the shoes had to be adorned with real jewels to justify their \$1 million insured value.

Martin, who lives near Grand Rapids, said at an Oc-

tober hearing that he hoped to take what he thought were real rubies from the shoes and sell them. But a person who deals in stolen goods, known as a fence, informed him the rubies weren’t real, Martin said. So he got rid of the slippers.

Defense attorney Dane DeKrey wrote in court documents that Martin’s unidentified former associate persuaded him to steal the slippers as “one last score,” even though Martin had seemed to have “finally put his demons to rest” after finishing his last prison term nearly 10 years earlier.

Freeloading boyfriend makes woman feel like a bad person

DEAR ABBY: I’ve been with the same guy for almost five years. I was madly in love with him the first three years, but after I had my daughter, things slowly changed. We haven’t been intimate in a while. I had some female issues I wanted to take care of, plus I’m not physically attracted to him anymore. He makes little comments about it to make me feel bad. He doesn’t want to discuss anything, so talking to him is impossible.

We broke up a few months ago but got back together. He moved all his stuff out, so now he makes me feel guilty, telling me he has nothing and our house doesn’t feel like his anymore. By the way, he doesn’t pay for rent or household expenses like groceries, etc. I pay for everything because he doesn’t work. Yet I have to give him money for his gambling addiction.

I don’t want to be with him anymore. But the last time we broke up, he was terribly verbally abusive, and I don’t want to go through that again. What should I do?

INDECISIVE IN ILLINOIS

DEAR INDECISIVE: Tell him you no longer want to be his sugar mama; he will have to find someone else to feed him and finance his gambling addiction. Do NOT do it while the two of you are alone. Make sure to have several friends or relatives with you for moral support and to help

him collect whatever things he has at your place. If you do, it may curb his verbal abuse. After that, change the locks on your doors and do not admit him to the house again. If he forces his way in, summon the police. If you don’t rid yourself of him, he will suck you dry.

■■■

DEAR ABBY: My in-laws live 90 minutes away, so when they visit, they usually stay with us for a night or two. I don’t mind hosting them. They are delightful people, and we always have a good time. However, now that they’re getting older, I’m wondering what the etiquette is for sleeping arrangements.

We don’t have a guest bedroom, so they sleep on a pullout sofa with a pillow topper. While they’ve never mentioned it, I know it’s not all that comfy, and I know they have some age-related aches and pains. When my grandparents stayed with us when I was a kid, they usually slept in my sister’s double bed, and she slept on the floor in the room I shared with my other sister.

Would offering my in-laws my son’s double bed be a good idea going forward? (Something about offering the master bedroom seems weird.) I’m fortunate to have great in-laws and would like to do right by them. It’s just a night or two, after all. What would you recommend I do?

COMFORT CREATURE IN NEW JERSEY

DEAR ABBY

BY ABIGAIL VAN BUREN
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE



Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

DEAR COMFORT CREATURE: Ask your in-laws whether they would be more comfortable if you changed their sleeping arrangements. If they say yes, have a chat with your son, explain the problem and tell him you want him to sleep on the pullout sofa bed when his grandparents are visiting.

■■■

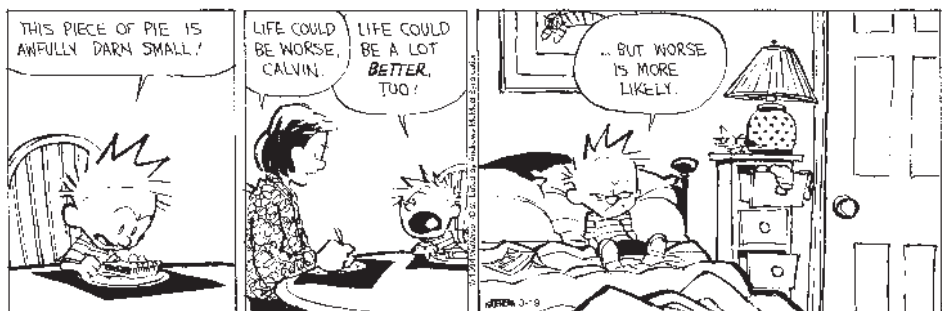
Abby shares more than 100 of her favorite recipes in two booklets: “Abby’s Favorite Recipes” and “More Favorite Recipes by Dear Abby.” Send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for \$16 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby, Cookbooklet Set, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)

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Pastimes

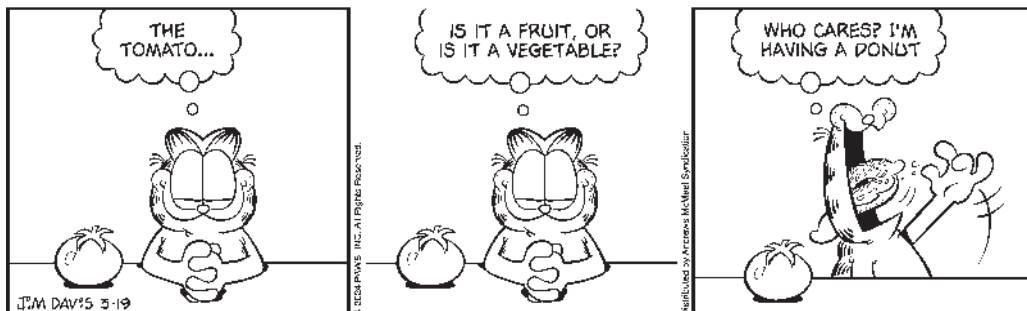
Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson



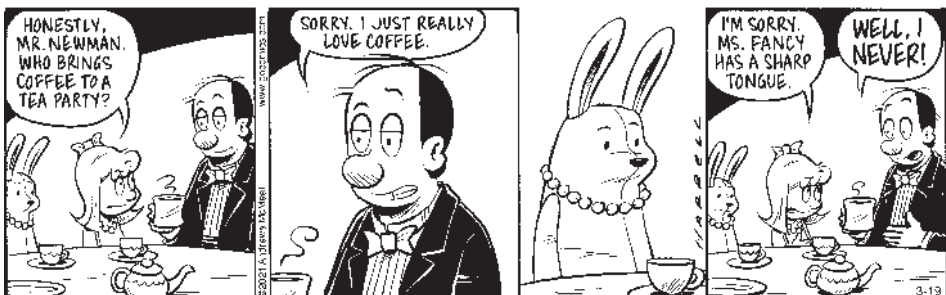
Garfield®

By Jim Davis



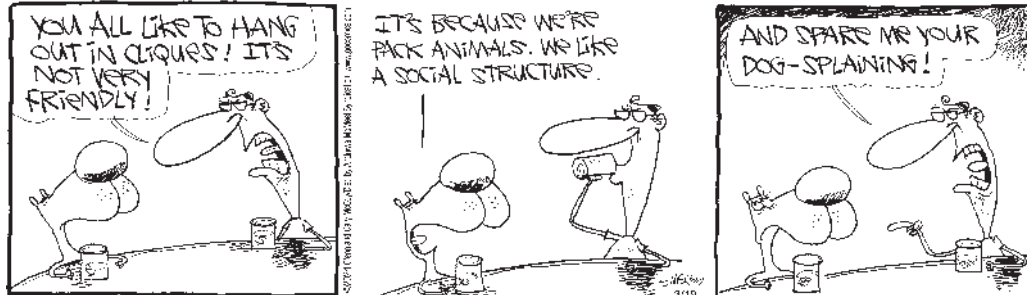
Adam@home

By Bryan Basset



The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy



CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Online craft shop

5 Mosquito barrier

8 Unruly kid

12 Valentine border

13 I love (Lat.)

14 Franc replacement

15 Physical

16 Capable of being subdued

18 Dressing ingredient

20 Two-tone cookies

21 Zero

22 French vineyard

23 Viola bow application

26 Like some thrift shop items

30 Longoria of TV

31 Irish actor Stephen

32 Signing need

33 Price of horror films

DOWN

36 Smoked an e-cig

38 "Treasure Island" mono-gram

39 Mas' mates

40 Zodiac ram

43 Wine merchant

47 Indian curry dish

49 July's stone

50 Eight (Pref.)

51 Lucy of "Kill Bill"

52 Kin to a clarinet

53 "— on first?"

54 LPs' successors

55 Taxpayer IDs

1 Hgt.

2 Uber alternative

3 Read quickly

4 Saudi neighbor

5 Fleet-related

6 Mideast ruler

7 Great weight

8 Lebanese capital

9 Hayseed son

11 Low digits

17 Iowa crop

19 Martini liquor

22 "Home-land" org.

23 Speed (up)

24 Egg (Pref.)

25 — Juan

26 Kitty's doc

27 PC program

28 "My word!"

29 Conclude

31 Hosp. workers

34 Beliefs

35 Film lioness

36 Moving vehicle

37 Houston team

39 Reverent

40 Acknowledge

41 Opulent

42 Division word

43 Nullify

44 Worn-down pencils

45 Black, in verse

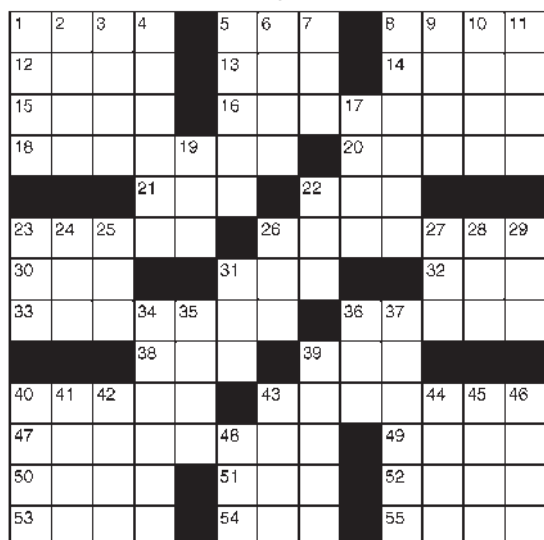
46 Deli loaves

48 Business letters

Solution time: 22 mins.

M	C	S	D	A	L	J	U	L	E	P
T	A	N	O	V	O	E	S	T	E	E
N	I	A	W	E	S	T	W	O	R	L
O	R	C	D	R	E	S	S			
R	O	K	U	S	R	A	D	A	D	A
L	Y	E	R	E	A	S	O	N		
E	L	E	N	A			R	U	L	E
K	A	Y	A	K	S	U	R	N		
G	H	E	E		C	O	S	T	H	U
				M	O	N	E	T	E	M
W	O	R	L	D	W	I	D	E	I	I
E	T	H	I	C		O	U	R	S	A
S	I	O	L	I	N	P	R	I	K	O

Last Friday's Answer



STUMPED?

For answers to today's crossword, call 1-800-226-5955! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: AJ Lee, 37; Bruce Willis, 69; Glenn Close, 77; Ursula Andress, 88.

Happy Birthday: Dream, believe and make it happen. Let your imagination take you on a tour of possibilities. Explore your options, implement safety measures and start a new adventure. Get back to the activities you know and love, plan to enjoy more and stop laboring over what you can't change. Don't limit what you can do; embrace life, love and happiness. Your numbers are 9, 14, 20, 26, 34, 38, 42.

ARIES (March 21-April 19): Keep your plans and secrets to yourself. The less you let others know, the easier it will be to reach your target. Check out what interests you and consider turning it into a lucrative pastime. Let the child within give birth to new beginnings. **

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): Settle in and make your home environment functional, and you'll save time and money. Consider how you can improve your appearance, health and emotional well-being. Set out on a journey to discover what makes you happy, and implement the life you want to live. ****

GEMINI (May 21-June 20): Connect with people who spark your imagination and encourage and support your efforts. A short trip, reunion or catch up with someone you love and respect will help you gain perspective regarding what you've accomplished and what's next on your agenda. ***

CANCER (June 21-July 22): Don't sit back; do whatever it takes to excel. Be inventive, take the initiative and strive to

be the best. Be the one to bring about change and set trends. Step into the spotlight and embrace being the center of attention. *****

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): Learn something that helps you improve your life. Choosing a lifestyle and occupation that makes you happy will benefit your emotional well-being. It's never too late to start anew and to find your bliss. A physical change will start your desire for internal change. ***

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): Be receptive to change, and you'll find a positive path forward. An open mind will lead to unexpected opportunities and a chance to close one door while opening another. Regret is a waste of time; fill your day with research and discovering what's next. ****

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): Put your energy to good use. Take care of unfinished business; it will give you the boost you need to start something new and exciting. Pay attention to where your money goes. It will help to put a budget in place. *****

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): Listen, but only buy into plans that feel right for you. Revisit your lifestyle and consider what you find limiting. You must address issues directly for change to have a positive effect. Sign up for a course that offers insight into an intriguing lifestyle. *****

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): Withholding feelings will result in a misunderstanding. Share your intentions and voice what's important to you, and you'll find out where you stand and what you must do to keep the peace. Be willing to compromise. ***

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Your actions matter. Don't promise something you cannot deliver. A change at home can make the difference between happiness and regret. Be clear about what you need and are willing to give in return. ***



AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): Observation will be revealing. Focus on how others respond to your gestures and requests. Discussing shared expenses or possessions will offer insight into what lies ahead. Keep an open mind and be receptive to suggestions. ****



PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): Replenish what you've depleted emotionally, physically and financially. Nurture what's meaningful to you, and you'll feel the difference in attitude and how you utilize your skills and time. Speed things up and put your energy where it brings the highest return. *****

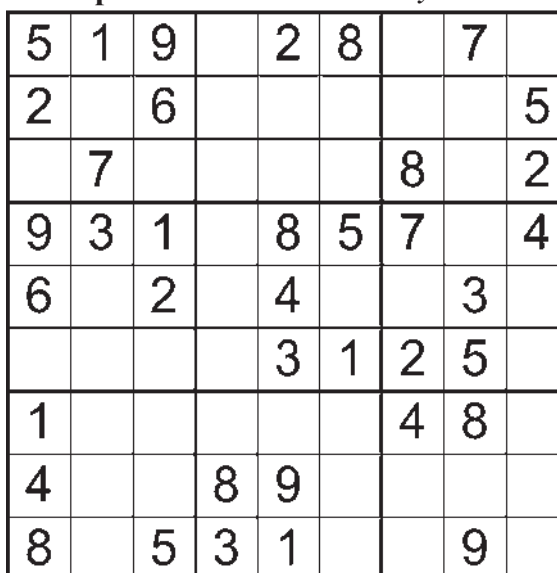
Birthday Baby: You are intuitive, visual and entertaining. You are dynamic and helpful.

☾: Avoid conflicts; work behind the scenes. ☼: You can accomplish, but don't rely on others. ☼☼: Focus and you'll reach your goals. ☼☼☼: Aim high; start new projects. ☼☼☼☼: Nothing can stop you; go for gold.

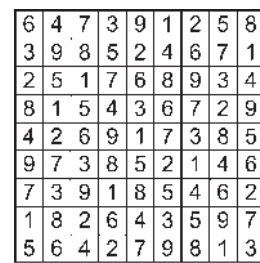
SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku

By Dave Green



Last Friday's Answer



Difficulty: ★

3/19

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WONDERWORD

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the WONDERWORD.

MARCH MADNESS

Solution: 9 letters



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Arizona, Athletes, Basketball, Boston, Brooklyn, Coach, Conference, Court, Dallas, Dates, Dayton, Division, Finals, Foul, Game, Layup, Lineup, Little Caesars, Los Angeles, Memphis, Men's, Midwest, NCAA, Offense, Omaha, Period, Rankings, Salt Lake City, Schedule, Shot Clock, South, Stadium, State Farm, Substitute, Teams, Zone

Last Friday's Answer: Computers
To purchase THE COLLECTED WONDERWORD, Volumes 56 through 76, order on line at www.WonderWordBooks.com. In Canada, call 1-855-232-2367.

Lillard, Portis combine for 62 and the Bucks outpace Suns, 140-129



MILWAUKEE (AP)—Damian Lillard had 31 points and 16 assists and Bobby Portis had 31 points and 10 rebounds to lead Milwaukee past the Phoenix Suns 140-129 on Sunday, as the Bucks hit 24 3-pointers to win without star Giannis Antetokounmpo.

Antetokounmpo, averaging 30.8 points and 11.2 rebounds, was out with left hamstring soreness. He missed just his fourth game of the season and first since March 4, when he was out with Achilles tendinitis.

Phoenix trailed 109-94 after three quarters, but closed within 122-115 on a lay-in by Bradley Beal with 6:17 left. Lillard's 3-pointer from the top left put Milwaukee up 134-120 with 3:18 remaining.

Khris Middleton added 22 points for Milwaukee in his first game back after missing 16 games with a sprained left ankle. The Bucks finished 24 of 41 from 3-point range, with Portis and Malik Beasley hitting five apiece.

Beal had 28 points, Grayson Allen had 25 points and Devin Booker scored 23 for Phoenix.

MAVERICKS 107, NUGGETS 105

DALLAS (AP)—Kyrie Irving hit a running left-handed shot at the buzzer, capping a wild final 26 seconds and giving Dallas a victory over Denver.

The Nuggets rallied from 13



AP
Milwaukee Bucks' Bobby Portis reacts after his three pointer during the first half of an NBA basketball game Sunday, March 17, 2024, in Milwaukee.

points down midway through the fourth quarter and went ahead on Jamal Murray's tie-breaking 3-pointer with 26 seconds remaining.

Luka Doncic answered almost immediately on the inbounds pass after a timeout, hitting from several feet behind the arc for a 105-105 tie.

After Murray missed an elbow jumper in the final seconds, Dallas called timeout. The right-handed Irving took the inbounds pass, dribbled with his left hand as Nikola Jokic pursued and hit the shot from about 20 feet.

Denver had a five-game road winning streak stopped. The Nuggets had won all five by double digits, a first in franchise history.

MAGIC 111, RAPTORS 96

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP)—Paolo Banchero scored 29 points and Orlando Magic pulled away from Toronto handing the Raptors their seventh straight loss.

Franz Wagner had 22 points, nine rebounds and five assists for Orlando, and his brother, Moritz, scored 14 points. The Magic improved to 8-2 in their last 10 games.

Jordan Nwora led the injury-ravaged Raptors with 18 points, including 12 during an impressive third-quarter burst. Gary Trent Jr. scored 15 points, and Immanuel Quickley and Bruce Brown each had 12.

The Raptors, who lead the NBA in fast-break points after scoring 37 in a loss to the Magic on Friday night, were held to just 16. They went 8 for 31 from 3-point range and committed 18 turnovers.

CELTICS 130, WIZARDS 104

WASHINGTON (AP)—Sam Hauser had career highs of 30

points and 10 3-pointers to help the short-handed Boston beat Washington.

Jayson Tatum also scored 30 points with six 3-pointers as the NBA-leading Celtics hit 24 shots from beyond the arc in a game in which they never trailed despite missing three starters.

In the first of back-to-back games—with a game against Detroit on Monday—Derrick White (left hand sprain) and Jaylen Brown (right ankle sprain) joined Kristaps Porzingis (right hamstring strain) among the ranks of injured Boston players.

Tatum also has been questionable with an ankle issue entering Wednesday. Instead, he played his 31st consecutive game and Hauser made his 16th career start to power Boston to 81 points before halftime and a lead that reached 36 points in the third quarter.

Hauser shot 10 for 13 from long distance and Boston went 17 for 28 from 3-point range in the first half. The Celtics shot 48% from beyond the arc despite remov-

ing their starters midway through the third quarter.

HEAT 104, PISTONS 101

DETROIT (AP)—Bam Adebayo made a 3-pointer at the buzzer to lift Miami to a win over Detroit.

Cade Cunningham missed a 3-pointer for Detroit with 9 seconds left and Terry Rozier sprinted up the court with the rebound. He couldn't get to the basket, so he tossed the ball to Adebayo, who made his third 3-pointer in the last three games.

Duncan Robinson scored a season-high 30 points for Miami on 10-for-15 shooting. Adebayo had 20 points and 17 rebounds as the Heat beat the Pistons for the second time in three days.

Robinson hit his 1,000th career 3-pointer in the first quarter. He reached the mark in 343 games, breaking the NBA record of 350 by Buddy Hield.

HAWKS 110, CLIPPERS 93

LOS ANGELES (AP)—

Dejounte Murray scored 21 points, De'Andre Hunter added 20 and Atlanta Hawks beat the Los Angeles Clippers to snap a three-game losing streak.

Jalen Johnson had 18 points and 12 rebounds, and Clint Capela added 15 points and 13 rebounds for the Hawks.

Murray had five 3-pointers, marking a career-high fifth straight game he has knocked down at least four from beyond the arc. The Hawks were 17 for 34 on 3-pointers after tying a season high with 20 in Friday night's loss at Utah.

Kawhi Leonard scored 28 points to lead the Clippers, and Paul George had 26. Los Angeles has lost four of its last five and is in fourth place in the Western Conference.

SPURS 122, NETS 115, OT

SAN ANTONIO (AP)—Victor Wembanyama had 33 points and 16 rebounds as San Antonio Spurs overcame 31 points by Cam Thomas and beat Brooklyn in overtime.

Wembanyama added seven assists and seven blocks while collecting his 36th double-double in 60 games. The 7-foot-4 rookie center has five games of at least 20 points, 10 rebounds, five blocks and five assists.

Wembanyama had an alley-oop dunk and followed that by blocking Dennis Schroder's layup attempt, preserving San Antonio's 116-115 lead with 38 seconds remaining.

Schroder finished with 19 points and Mikal Bridges added 14 points, including three in a low-scoring overtime.

Keldon Johnson's 3-pointer with 64 seconds remaining in regulation put the Spurs up 110-107. Johnson's 3 closed a 17-4 run, including four straight points from Wembanyama to tie the game.

Nick Nurse says doctors 'happy with progress' following Embiid's surgery

PHILADELPHIA (AP)—Joel Embiid has been re-evaluated by doctors and they are "happy with the progress" the 76ers center is making following meniscus surgery on his left knee, Philadelphia head coach Nick Nurse said Saturday.

"I think there's always stages of how these things progress," Nurse said before the Sixers faced the Charlotte Hornets. "Everyone wants to know 'Well how long is it going to be?' And they give a wide range because of that, because everyone heals differently. We're just trying to take it as it comes, get him healthy and get him back when he's ready to go."

Asked if he believes that Embiid will be back with the team before the playoffs, Nurse was cautious.

"I'm still hoping so and pretty confident, yes," the coach said.

Embiid's status has been

a source of speculation with an expected team medical update never coming on the re-evaluation after the Feb. 6 surgery. Embiid said on Feb. 29 that he believed that he would be back for the playoffs, but the team's silence on the matter had created some questions about where the rehab process was.

Embiid, who celebrated his 30th birthday on Saturday, has missed 21 games since tearing the meniscus against Golden State on Jan. 30. In the time since, Philadelphia has fallen from third in the Eastern Conference to eighth, going 8-13 in the 21 games without the 2022-23 NBA MVP.

Embiid was spotted greeting teammates on the court after Philadelphia's 109-98 win over Charlotte on Saturday night, but was not in the team's locker room when reporters were allowed in after the game.

Wembanyama and Spurs confirm they're headed to France next season

AUSTIN, Texas (AP)—Victor Wembanyama sounds like he expects to be playing an NBA game—or two, perhaps—in his native France next season.

San Antonio coach Gregg Popovich confirmed Sunday night that the Spurs are heading to Paris next season, something that former Spurs guard Tony Parker revealed to French reporters several weeks ago.

"We're going there," Popovich said. The comment about Paris came after San Antonio topped Brooklyn in Austin, Texas, in what was a home game for the Spurs.

Added Wembanyama, the French star and overwhelm-

ing favorite to win the NBA's rookie of the year honor this season: "I'm looking forward to it very much."

The NBA hasn't announced which teams will be playing in Paris next season; it has long been expected that San Antonio and Indiana would be the teams selected. At the All-Star Game last month, Commissioner Adam Silver said Wembanyama "would very much like to see" the Spurs playing in France next season.

"I can say that we will be back playing a regular-season game again in Paris," Silver said last month. "There's some discussions ongoing about which arena we will play in. Stay tuned in terms of the

Spurs playing in Paris."

Also unclear: if it'll be a one- or two-game trip for the Spurs.

Parker said at this year's NBA Paris Game between Brooklyn and Cleveland that he expects the league to play two games in France next season. Wembanyama appeared to make reference to that possibility as well when asked on Sunday night about the prospect of playing in France with the Spurs.

"Obviously, it's going to be probably the game or the games where it's going to be very important for me because of course it's me coming back (to) where I come from," Wembanyama said. "It might be in my city or around the city. It's going to be very special."

The NBA has played three regular season games in Paris since 2020, all of them taking place in January. The league hasn't revealed when it'll announce the slate of international games for next season. Silver has said that Mexico City—which has played host to 13 regular-season games over the years, 10 of those coming since 2017—is expected back on the NBA slate for 2024-25 as well.

"The chances are very high," Silver told reporters in Mexico City earlier this season.

Wembanyama is also expected to play several games in France this summer, representing his country in the Paris Olympics.

Choju only undefeated team left in Legends hoops

By LEIGH GASES

leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Choju is the only undefeated team left in the Legends Sports

Association Invitational Basketball League Season 2.

They won their fifth straight game after they blew out Best Deal, 111-72 last Sunday at the Gillette Multi-Purpose Gymnasium in Gualo Rai.

It was youth versus experience and Choju showed that they're the team to beat this season as they out-gassed Best Deal from the get-go.

The first half saw some back-and-forth action that kept Choju a little close—less than a 10-point gap throughout, but turnovers and defensive mishaps set Best Deal back into the double-digit margin in the second half.

A few minutes into the second half, Choju began to pull away further into the



LEIGH GASES

A Choju player goes for a 3-pointer during their game against Best Deal in the Legends Sports Association Invitational Basketball League Season 2 at the Gillette Multi-Purpose Gymnasium in Gualo Rai.

VELORIA

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32:56, Helen Olbes was second at 36:23, and third was Soon Hee Bak with a time of 41:38.

The male submaster division was dominated by Henry Fandel at 21:16, followed by Kevin Zimmer at 24:35, and Scott Smith with 29:02.

Chad Taflinger was first place in the male master division with a time of 21:21; second place was Jason Leublee at 25:44; and third place was Charlie Sendin at 27:35.

In the senior male division, James Abuy was first with a time of 24:19; second was Matthew Furan in 24:52; and third was Raymund Tolentino at 25:43.

Lastly, the grandmaster first place was Chong Nam Lee at 23:40, second was Changwhan Jang at 26:43; and third was Ponciano Corotan at 44:51.

Participants—competitive or joining just for fun—were greeted with explosions of col-

ored powder at designated stops along Puerto Rico. They then made their way to "shower" at the bubble machine—with kids and adults alike having fun with the special feature of the event.

Triple J Enterprises Inc. vice president Mike Sablan said after the event that the turnout exceeded their expectations. "We're very pleased with the turnout. There are a number of participants who do this race for time, but the vast majority come here for fun and that's what we want to bring to the community, and at the same time, raising money for charity, like what we did in previous years," said Sablan.

"We want to thank all the sponsors that came to help us. We know it's been a difficult three years and in spite of it, many of our sponsors came forward to help us and we're very grateful for their support," he said.

Platinum sponsors were: Tan Holdings, Tan Siu Lin Foundation, Hagu Real, and United



LEIGH GASES

Senior division first place James Abuy poses with second place Matthew Furan and third place Raymund Tolentino on the podium during the awards ceremony of the 2024 Triple J 5K Bubble Color Run last Saturday at the Micro Beach parking lot.



LEIGH GASES

Grandmaster division first place Chong Nam Lee poses with second place Changwhan Jang and third place Ponciano Corotan on the podium during the awards ceremony of the 2024 Triple J 5K Bubble Color Run last Saturday at the Micro Beach parking lot.

Airlines; Gold sponsors were Island Image and Motion, Saipan Tribune, Marianas Variety, Mobil, and Run Saipan; Silver sponsors were First Hawaiian Bank, Gold's Gym, Kensington Hotel Saipan, McDonald's Saipan, Elliot Systems, Micronesian Brokers, Bank of Guam, Foremost/Coca Cola; Bronze sponsors were Crowne Plaza

Resort Saipan, Docomo Pacific, IT&E, Marpac, Wushin Corp., and Saipan Ice and Water Company; Race sponsors were Hyatt Regency Saipan, STAR Water, and WSTCO. A special thank you to National Park Service, Department of Fire and Emergency Medical Services, Department of Public Safety, and Sound Hire.

lead as Gerald Mamis dealt two straight threes, followed up by two more threes from Jay Art Palmes and Brandon Babauta.

Best Deal had wasted opportunities because of Choju's man-to-man defense, and they failed to close the gap toward the end. It was a physically exhausting game and Best Deal were a frequent flier to the free throw line, with a lot of their points made from there in the second half.

This didn't stop Choju's impenetrable defense, and coupled with their razor-sharp shooting, left Best Deal in their dust. Palmes went on to rack up 18 points, followed

by Kaipo Dikito's 17, and Junior Aguon's 15.

Best Deal's Jeter Medina was a one-man show as he put up 24 markers, while Ronald Rueda was the only other player in double digits with 16.

In other results that night, La Mesa Kusina defeated Napa Auto Parts, 93-82.

In last Saturday's results, Premier Builders edged Save-more, 94-86, and Taxpro/Triple L slipped past Longshot, 92-90. Last Thursday, KagBros trounced Elite Force, 72-59, and Yuman beat out Bourbon Bar & Cafe, 85-83. Last Tuesday, TanHoldings beat Stag, 87-62, and Unity Trade won over Live 2 Live, 72-62.

Choju leads Bracket A standings with their undefeated five-win record, followed by Unity Trade and Premier Builders' 3-2; Best Deal and Bourbon Bar & Cafe are at 2-2; Yuman is at 2-3; Save-more has a 1-3 record; and Live 2 Live have four losses.

TanHoldings and KagBros are atop Bracket B with 4-1 records each; Taxpro/Triple L is at 3-2; Longshot and Elite Force are at 2-2 each; Lamesa Kusina has a 2-3 record; Stag is at 1-3; and Napa Auto Parts are winless at four losses.

Choju 111 – Palmes 18, Dikito 17, J. Aguon 15, Satur 11, Pangelinan 9, H. Aguon 9, Faisao 8, Mamis 8, Lizama 8, Babauta 6, Santos 2.

Best Deal 72 – Medina 24, Rueda 16, Victoria 9, Ibajan 5, Odicka 4, Castro 4, Palima 3, Cortes 2, Anciete 2, M. Tagle 2, D. Tagle 1.

Scoring by halves: 55-42, 111-72.

ARIC

From page 16

champion Ellery Cruz.

"He's the one who taught me everything!" he said.

In the Mini II Class, T.J. Ferrer made it 2-for-2 so far in the season after another perfect score of 50 points. Calix Cruz was second with his 44 points.

SABLAN

From page 16

Cruz and Delos Santos have five each; and three others are tied with four each.

Dela Cruz also leads the RBIs category with 25; Cartfield Sablan has 21; Delos Santos has 18; and Maratita collected 17.

Eric Tudela has the most runs with 17; Dela Cruz, Toves, and John Terlaje have 16 each; and George has 15.

Ninety feet away on the bump, the pitching leader is Redmen's Greg Magofna. He

In the Women's Class, Billie Inabo Pangelinan won both heats for 50 points to top the division, followed by Mari Alvarez and Merissa Rasa with 44 points and 22 points, respectively.

Results of the other divisions of the March race will be published in the next issues of *Saipan Tribune*.

sports the lowest ERA at 3.652 from four games, 23 innings pitched, has 12 earned runs, and a 3-1 record.

Second is Sufa's Kallie Igisomar with a 5.514 ERA, pitched in six games totaling 29.2 innings, and has 23 ER, with a 4-2 record. Third is Tokahao's Jojo Attao with an ERA of 7.379 from six games, 35.1 innings, has 37 ER, and has an even 3-3 record.

Jerry Guerrero has collected the most strikeouts with 31; Openg Celis and Leo Bobai both have 16; Bruce Laniyo has 15; and Attao has 14.



LEIGH GASES

Masters first place Julie Ruszala poses with second place Angela Taflinger and third place Marjorie Ganacias on the podium during the awards ceremony of the 2024 Triple J 5K Bubble Color Run last Saturday at the Micro Beach parking lot.



Saipan Tribune Sports



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SAIPAN TRIBUNE

Sablan, Babauta lead individual standings

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

Pete Sablan and Bong Babauta lead their respective divisions in the 2024 Budweiser Belau Amateur Softball Association league as of March 10.

Sablan, of the Man Amigos in the masters division, is the batting leader with a .762 batting average from 16 hits out of 21 at-bats. Sufa's Audie Maratita is second at .708 from 17 out of 24 chances. Third is Man Amigos' Mark Toves at .700 from 21 of 30 plate appearances.

Meanwhile, Babauta leads the women's division with a batting average of .652 from 15 out of 25 at-bats. Second is 670 Magas Babes' Catalyna Dela Cruz at .640 from 16 hits out of 25 at-bats, and third is Bolas' Bon Iguel with .609 from 14 of 23 tries. In the doubles category, Dela Cruz hit the most with six; Vickyann Pangelinan hit five; and Kianu Aldan and Mayiah Duenas have four each.

Aldan has the most triples

with two, while 18 others have one each.

Aldan also has the most homers with two, while Kiana Camacho, Rachel Salalila, Destiny Pangelinan, and Rosie Saralu have one each.

Dela Cruz, Duenas, and Sheena Maratita have the most RBIs with 11 each; Heather Kladikm has 10; and nine players have five each.

Dela Cruz and Aldan have the most runs with 13 each; Janica Iguel has 12; and Babauta and Ashley Angui have 11 each.

The pitching leader is the Lady Blue Jays' Angel Deleon Guerrero with an ERA of 3.64. She has played in eight games with 50 innings pitched, 26 earned runs, and a 6-2 record. Second is Bolas' Ashley Aguon who has a 4.953 ERA, pitched five games and 21.2 innings, has 15 ER, and three losses, while third is Bat & Boujee's Janice Celis with a 6.143 ERA, eight games and 49 innings

pitched, and has a 4-4 record.

Celis has the most strikeouts with 38, Jovie Omar has 29; Edilynn Benjamin struck out 28; Deleon Guerrero struck out 26; and Evita Maratita has 25 strikeouts.

Back to the masters division, the doubles leader is Maratita with eight; Joe Lizama and Jason Reyes have seven each; Jerome Delos Santos has six; and Derek Aguon hit five.

Clint Quitugua has the most

triples with three; and Toves, Roy Tudela, John Acosta, and Suo Matsutaro have two each.

Joey Dela Cruz leads the home run category with seven; Chris George has six; Geoff

See SABLON on Page 15



LEIGH GASES

Man Amigos' Pete Sablan swings at a pitch during one of their games in the 2024 Budweiser Belau Amateur Softball Association master's league at the Dandan Softball Field.

Aric Cruz tops Intermediate Class

By MARK RABAGO
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EDITOR



Youngster Aric Cruz topped the Intermediate Class of last Sunday's race in the 2024 "MOTO IV" Points Race Series at the Cowtown Race Park.

The 17-year-old Saipan Southern High School student won both heats for a perfect score of 50 points in Marianas Racing Association's March competition. Vicente Palacios and Charles Cepeda completed the Top 3 with 44 points and 40 points, respectively.

"It was a fun race although it was a hot and not windy day. I'm glad to be putting the Yamaha up front. Honestly, I want to dedicate this race to the Lord for providing me with what I have and receive. I want to also thank my family and friends for the support especially my father and my mother for gifting me my new 2024 Yamaha Yz250f," said Cruz.

He also thanked his spon-

sors RPM Yamaha Guam, Marpac, Ina's Kitchen, YCO Hardware, Marianas Native, ChokeChain, TurnKey Solutions, Winners Hardware, and PacificLine Construction.

Cruz got his riding chops from no other than his father, MRA president and former three-time Expert Class

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Aric Cruz in action in the Intermediate Class of last Sunday's race in the 2024 "MOTO IV" Points Race Series at the Cowtown Race Park.

Veloria, Jang top open divisions of Triple J 5K

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

Sildrey Veloria and Suzie Jang topped the male/female open divisions (20-29 years old) in the 2024 Triple J 5K Bubble Color Run last Saturday.

The explosion of color started at the course start line at the Micro Beach parking lot behind Hyatt Regency Saipan, headed up north to Puerto Rico, then to the finish at the Hyatt Regency

Saipan Club Elan parking lot.

Veloria and Pony Tang were actually in the lead heading to the turnaround, but both were surpassed by overall winner Victor Nash Santos, so Veloria settled for third overall, but first in the male open division with his time 19:21.

Second was Jordan Ruiz with a time of 21:55 and third place was Shigeki Tenorio at 23:44.

Jang placed first in the female

open division with a time of 36:37, second was Jan Travilla at 36:48, and third went to Charmaine Salazar who clocked in at 39:38.

In the female sub-master division (30-39), Roxanne Soriano came in first at 43:17, Hanna Ramos was second at 44:17, and third was Salome Balears at 44:23.

First place in the female masters (40-49), was Julie Ruszala with a time of 25:07, second was Angela Taflinger at 25:48, and third was Marjorie Gancias with 27:56.

Seniors (50-59) first place was Lydia Tan at 31:42, second was Marilou Carlos at 44:56, and third went to Zi Wen Jin at 57:44.

Grandmasters (60+) first place was Corina Arzadon at

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LEIGH GASES

Sildrey Veloria runs into the finish line at the Hyatt Regency Saipan Club Elan parking lot during the 2024 Triple J 5K Bubble Color Run last Saturday.



LEIGH GASES

Open division first place Sildrey Veloria poses with second place Jordan Ruiz and third place Shigeki Tenorio on the podium during the awards ceremony of the 2024 Triple J 5K Bubble Color Run last Saturday at the Micro Beach parking lot.